

# The Double Session

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First version published in *Tel Quel*, nos. 41 and 42, 1970. The text was there accompanied by a preliminary editorial note, which we here reproduce:

"The title has been proposed by the editors. For reasons that will become clear in the reading, this text did not present itself under any title. It formed the occasion for two sessions (February 26 and March 5, 1969) of the *Groupe d'Etudes théoriques*. The reader should also know that at that time only the first part of "La Dissémination" had been published (*Critique*, no. 261, February 1969).

"Each participant had been handed a sheet on which a passage from Plato's *Philebus* (38e–39e) and Mallarmé's *Mimique* (Pléiade, p. 310) had been printed. We are reproducing here the typography and the topography of that handout. Is it pointless to add that a blackboard stood covered with a series of framed and numbered quotations? And that the room was lighted by a sumptuous, old-fashioned lustre?" (Editor's note)"

1. TN. *Lustre*: "A decorative object, as a chandelier having glass pendants" (American Heritage Dictionary).



SOCRATES: And if he had someone with him, he would put what he said to himself into actual speech addressed to his companion, audibly uttering those same thoughts, so that what before we called opinion (δόξαν) has now become assertion (λόγος).—PROTARCHUS: Of course.—SOCRATES: Whereas if he is alone he continues thinking the same thing by himself, going on his way maybe for a considerable time with the thought in his mind.—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, I wonder whether you share my view on these matters.—PROTARCHUS: What is it?—SOCRATES: It seems to me that at such times our soul is like a book (Δοκεῖ μοι τότε ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ βιβλίῳ τινὶ προσεικέναι).—PROTARCHUS: How so?—SOCRATES: It appears to me that the conjunction of memory with sensations, together with the feelings consequent upon memory and sensation, may be said as it were to write words in our souls (γράφειν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τότε λόγους). And when this experience writes what is true, the result is that true opinion and true assertions spring up in us, while when the internal scribe that I have suggested writes what is false (ψευδῆ δ' ὅταν ὁ τοιοῦτος παρ' ἡμῖν γραμματεὺς γράψῃ), we get the opposite sort of opinions and assertions.—PROTARCHUS: That certainly seems to me right, and I approve of the way you put it.—SOCRATES: Then please give your approval to the presence of a second artist (δημιουργόν) in our souls at such a time.—PROTARCHUS: Who is that?—SOCRATES: A painter (Ζωγράφον) who comes after the writer and paints in the soul pictures of these assertions that we make.—PROTARCHUS: How do we make out that he in his turn acts, and when?—SOCRATES: When we have got those opinions and assertions clear of the act of sight (ὄψεως) or other sense, and as it were see in ourselves pictures or images (εἰκόνας) of what we previously opined or asserted. That does happen with us, doesn't it?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed it does.—SOCRATES: Then are the pictures of true opinions and assertions true, and the pictures of false ones false?—PROTARCHUS: Unquestionably.—SOCRATES: Well, if we are right so far, here is one more point in this connection for us to consider.—PROTARCHUS: What is that?—SOCRATES: Does all this necessarily befall us in respect of the present (τῶν ὄντων) and the past (τῶν γεγονότων), but not in respect of the future (τῶν μελλόντων)?—PROTARCHUS: On the contrary, it applies equally to them all.—SOCRATES: We said previously, did we not, that pleasures and pains felt in the soul alone might precede those that come through the body? That must mean that we have anticipatory pleasures and anticipatory pains in regard to the future.—PROTARCHUS: Very true.—SOCRATES: Now do those writings and paintings (γράμματα τε καὶ ζωγραφήματα), which a while ago we assumed to occur within ourselves, apply to past and present only, and not to the future?—PROTARCHUS: Indeed they do.—SOCRATES: When you say 'indeed they do', do you mean that the last sort are all expectations concerned with what is to come, and that we are full of expectations all our life long?—PROTARCHUS: Undoubtedly.—SOCRATES: Well now, as a supplement to all we have said, here is a further question for you to answer.

### MIMIQUE

Silence, sole luxury after rhymes, an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with thought and dusk, the detail of its signification on a par with a stilled ode and which it is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate! the silence of an afternoon of music; I find it, with contentment, also, before the ever original reappearance of Pierrot or of the poignant and elegant mime Paul Margueritte.

Such is this PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE composed and set down by himself, a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul. A whirlwind of naive or new reasons emanates, which it would be pleasing to seize upon with security: the esthetics of the genre situated closer to principles than any! (no)thing in this region of caprice foiling the direct simplifying instinct... This — "The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, in a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfilment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction." Less than a thousand lines, the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards, their humble depository. Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences — that, in the sole case, perhaps, with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading.

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| I   | "exit in the<br>midst of the session<br>I feign to carry off<br>the 160—the play<br>—I bring it back—<br>and return it<br>to the cubbyholes<br>the other way around<br>only when it has become<br>a book again"  | "<br><br>[where it seems<br>—Such is the double session" [(192A)]<br><br>". . . which<br>thus gives two sessions" [91(A)] |
| II  | "If it please some one, surprised by the scope, to incriminate . . . it will be (the) Language whose gambol this is.<br>—Words, of themselves, are exalted on many a facet known as the rarest or having value for the mind, the center of vibratory suspense; whoever perceives them independent of the ordinary sequence, projected, on the walls of a cave, as long as their mobility or principle lasts, being that which of discourse is not said: all of them quick, before becoming extinct or extinguished, to enter into a reciprocity of fires that is distant or presented on the bias as some contingency.<br>The debate—which the average necessary obviousness deflects into a detail, remains one for grammarians." (O.C. p. 386) |   |
| III | "In short<br>[in place of a page that each would have—<br>he will not<br>have it; I will keep all . . ." [121(A)]<br>"identity between<br>place and page<br>session and volume . . ." (p. 138)   | [is this beginning<br>by the end?]<br>[94(A)]   |
| IV  | "He has set foot in the antre; extracted the subtle remains" (O.C. 407).<br>"What inevitable treachery, however, in the fact of an evening of our existence lost in that antre of cardboard and painted canvas, or of genius: a Theater! if nothing is worth our taking an interest in it . . . The one, wholly intimate solemnities: to place the ivory knife in the darkness made by two joined pages of a volume: the other, luxurious, proud, and so specially Parisian: a <i>Premiere</i> in any spot at all . . ." (O.C. pp. 717–18).  |   |
| V   | "He finds himself in a place—City—where<br>Th<br>The deed that ought to have brought him glory<br>time in this Operation;" . . . [169(A)]<br>operation<br>"—the Hero<br>extricates —the Hymn<br>(the maternal one) that creates him, and is<br>restored to the Th it was—" [4(A)]  | of which he would have set up the<br>festival—(wedding)<br>Dr<br>is a crime: he stops in                                  |

2. *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé* [*Mallarmé's "Book"*], edited by Jacques Scherer (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 182. [Page numbers following quotations from Mallarmé refer either to *Le "Livre"* (generally recognizable by an accompanying (A) or (B), which, in Scherer's code, indicates the size of the manuscript page) or to the *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1945). Because of the care with which Derrida examines the details of Mallarmé's writing, existing translations of Mallarmé have proved unusable. Moreover, many of the texts cited have never, to my knowledge, been translated. For these reasons, all translations of Mallarmé's works are my own.—Trans.]

These quotations on the blackboard are to be pointed to in silence. So that, while reading a text already written in black and white, I can count on a certain across-the-board index, standing all the while behind me, white on black. In the course of these crossings, it will always be a certain way of writing in white that should be remarked.

The double session (figure I), about which I don't quite have the gall to say plumb straight out that it is reserved for the question *what is literature*, this question being henceforth properly considered a quotation already, in which the place of the *what is* ought to lend itself to careful scrutiny, along with the presumed authority under which one submits anything whatever, and particularly literature, to the form of its inquisition—this double session, about which I will never have the militant innocence to announce that it is concerned with the question *what is literature*, will find its corner BETWEEN [ENTRE] literature and truth, between literature and that by which the question *what is? wants* answering.

This double session will itself have been picked up on a corner, in the middle or the suspense of the two parts of a text, of which only one is visible, readable for having at least been published, and of which the whole is grafted onto *Numbers* which will have to be counted in. In the eyes of some, the reference to this half-absent text will be obvious. In any case, it can be taken for granted that the session and the text are neither absolutely separate nor simply inseparable.

The place of interest, then, this corner between literature and truth, will form a certain angle. It will be a figure of folding back, of the angle ensured by a fold.

And now there is the *question of the title*.

This, among others that are just as decisive, is an extremely profound question raised by Goux, concerning "The still unthought thought about the network, a polynodal, nonrepresentative organization, a thought about the *text* . . . the text which nothing can *entitle*. Without title or chapter; without head(ing) or capital."<sup>3</sup>

Mallarmé knew this. Indeed, he had constructed this question, or rather undone it with a bifid answer, separating the question from itself, displacing it toward an essential *indecision* that leaves its very titles up in the air.

Which introduces us (in)to the corner that interests us: *on the one hand*, Mallarmé prescribes a *suspension* of the title, which—like the head, or capital, or the oracle—carries its head high, speaks in too high a voice, both

3. Jean-Joseph Goux, "Numismatiques II," in *Tel Quel* 36, p. 59.

because it raises its voice and drowns out the ensuing text, and because it is found high up on the page, the top of the page becoming the eminent center, the beginning, the command station, the chief, the archon. Mallarmé thus urges that the title be stilled. A discreet injunction, found in the burst of an active fragment, upon a certain short, sharp ridge. From this we will also retain evidence of a certain hymen, to which the fact of indecision will later cause us to return:

*"I prefer, faced with aggression, to retort that contemporaries don't know how to read—*

*Unless it be in the newspaper; it dispenses, certainly, the advantage of not interrupting the chorus of preoccupations.*

*To read—*

*That practice—*

*To seek support, according to the page, upon the blank space, which inaugurates it, upon oneself, for an ingenuousness, forgetful even of the title that would raise its voice too high: and, when, in a break—the slightest, disseminated—chance is aligned, conquered word by word, indefectibly the white blank returns, a moment ago gratuitous, certain now, to conclude that nothing beyond and to authenticate the silence—*

*Virginity which solitarily, before a transparency of the adequate eye, has, itself, as it were divided itself into its fragments of candor, the one and the other, nuptial proofs of the Idea.*

*The air or song beneath the text, conducting divination from here to there, applies its motif in the form of an invisible fleuron or tailpiece" (p. 386–87).*

What resists the authority and presumption of the title, the plumbline and aplomb of the heading, is not merely the invisible tailpiece [*cul-de-lampe*] which, at the other extremity, and according to its definition in typographical terms, "serves to fill in a blank space on a page." What ruins the "pious capital letter" of the title and works toward the decapitation or ungluing of the text is the regular intervention of the blanks, the ordered return of the white spaces, the measure and order of dissemination, the law of spacing, the *ρυθμός*<sup>4</sup> (written character and cadence), the "punctuation which, disposed upon white paper, already produces signification there" (p. 655). The unfailing return, the periodic regularity of the white in the text ("indefectibly the white blank returns . . .") is re-marked in the "virginity," the

4. On the meaning and the problematics of this word, see Emile Benveniste, "The Notion of 'Rhythm' in Its Linguistic Expression," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary E. Meek (Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press, 1971); and K. Von Fritz, *Philosophie und sprachlicher Ausdruck bei Demokrit, Plato und Aristoteles* (Darmstadt, 1963), pp. 25 ff.

"candor," and the "nuptial proofs of the Idea." Through these words, and the whiteness of a certain veil that is interposed or torn, we have already been introduced, gently, into a certain angle in which we are interested. x

To *suspend* the title, then, is necessary, considering what the title dominates.

But the function of the title is not merely one of hierarchy. The title to suspend is also, by virtue of its place, suspended, in suspense or in suspension. Up above a text from which it expects and receives all—or nothing. Among other roles, this suspension occurs in the spot where Mallarmé has disposed the *lustre*, the innumerable lustres that hang over the stage of his texts.

The entitled, then, does not assign the capital of a type of writing; it ensures its suspense, along with its contours, its borders, its frame. It provides a first fold and draws a sort of womblike matrix of whiteness. Whence not only the painstaking care involved in the choice of titles (of which we will see several examples), but also, as far as the ungluing or decapitation is concerned, the "semantic reversal"<sup>5</sup> for which we will determine the law of indecision. Mallarmé recommends, then, that silence be imposed on the title but also that one draw upon it as upon the resources of a germinal or seminal blank. The function of the title sentences or generative sentences for Mallarmé has been recognized before. Robert G. Cohn devotes two chapters to it using the example of the *Throw of Dice*.<sup>6</sup> Writing to Maurice Guillemot,<sup>7</sup> Mallarmé *describes* the suspensive value of the title, or more precisely of the empty space it marks out at the top of the page. This letter has a claim on our interest for other motifs as well: for example, the motif of the singular practice of a *description* which is nothing less than a *representation*, notably when what seems to be in question is furniture, decor, and atmosphere (the description is of a kind of writing that describes itself, de-inscribes itself as it goes along, marking the angles and "coilings" or "reprises" that bring it back to itself; it is never simply a

5. In a different context, apropos of other examples, Jean-Pierre Richard analyzes what he calls precisely the "semantic reversal" of the theme of *la décollation* [ungluing/decapitation], in *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* [Mallarmé's Imaginary Universe] (Paris: Seuil, 1961), p. 199.

6. *L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé: Un coup de dés*, Librairie des Lettres, 1951. [Because R. G. Cohn's two books published in English on *Un coup de dés* (Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés: An Exegesis* and *Mallarmé's Masterwork: New Findings*) do not exactly correspond to this book originally published in French, I have translated the quotations from the French, using Cohn's corresponding English terminology where possible.—Trans.]

7. Quoted by Jacques Scherer, *L'Expression littéraire dans l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé* [Literary Expression in the Works of Mallarmé] (Paris: Droz, 1947), p. 79.

description of things); the motif too of a word I have never encountered anywhere else, not even in Mallarmé: syntaxer [syntaxier]. *"There is at Versailles a kind of wainscoting in scrollwork tracery, pretty enough to bring tears to the eyes; shells, coilings, curves, reprises of motifs. That is how the sentence I toss out on the paper first appears to me, in summary design, which I then review, purify, reduce, and synthesize. If one obeys the invitation proffered by the wide white space expressly left at the top of the page as if to mark a separation from everything, the already read elsewhere, if one approaches with a new, 'virgin' soul, one then comes to realize that I am profoundly and scrupulously a syntaxer, that my writing is entirely lacking in obscurity, that my sentence is what it has to be, and to be forever . . ."*

X The title will thus remain suspended, in suspension, up in the air, but glittering like a theater lustre of which the multiplicity of facets (figure II) can never be counted or reduced: *"Sole principle! and just as the lustre glistens, that is to say, itself, the prompt exhibition, under all its facets, of whatever, and our adamant sight, a dramatic work shows the succession of exteriorities of the act without any moment's retaining any reality and that in the final analysis what happens is nothing . . . the perpetual suspense of a tear that can never be entirely formed nor fall (still the lustre) scintillates in a thousand glances . . ."* (p. 296).

Since we will later find ourselves bolstering up this absence of event, the imminent, visible configuration of its non(taking)-place (*"without any moment's retaining any reality and that in the final analysis what happens is nothing"*), in the syntax of the curtain, the screen, the veil, let us recall, from among the *Services* [Offices], the *Sacred Pleasure* [Plaisir sacré]. The bow or baton of the conductor—of the orchestra—waiting, depending, like a lifted quill, can also be illuminated by some such suspension or lustre " . . . when the curtain is about to rise upon the desert magnificence of autumn. The imminent scattering of luminous fingering, which the foliage suspends, mirrors itself, then, in the pit of the readied orchestra.

*The conducting baton waits for a signal.*

*Never would the sovereign bow fall, beating out the first measure, if it were necessary at this special moment of the year that the lustre in the hall represent, with its multiple facets, any lucidity in the audience as to what they were doing there" (p. 388).*



There might perhaps be suspended, over this double session, a title faceted thus

[*pronounce without writing,*]

[*four times*<sup>8</sup>

that is,

that is,

that is,

THE "INTO" OF MALLARMÉ

THE "INTER" OF MALLARMÉ

THE ANTRE OF MALLARMÉ

THE IN-TWO OF "MALLARMÉ"<sup>9\*</sup>

It is written as it is pronounced.

And the first of the two subtitles would then be suspended by two dots, according to the syntax that is written thus

[*write, this time,*]

[*without pronouncing*

Hymen: INTER Platonem et Mallarmatum<sup>10\*</sup>

"*The speaker takes his seat*"<sup>11\*</sup>

\* Notes 9-11 appear on page 182.

8. Triumphantly, the opposition rushes in here with an objection, mobilized and marching forth in columns of *pressing business*: they will say *voilà!*, here is a play of the signifier that cannot be effected without being said aloud. Therefore it is no longer confined to the sole medium of that *writing* that has recently been grating on our ears.

For those who, lacking the ability to read, would be simple and hasty enough to content themselves with such an objection, let us very briefly go back over this: what is being pursued in the light of this lustre (and *is* indeed, in a sense, designed to grate on the ear) is a certain displacement of writing, a systematic transformation and generalization of its "concept." The old opposition between speech and writing no longer has any pertinence as a way of testing a text that deliberately deconstructs that opposition. Such a text is no more "spoken" than it is "written," no more *against* speech than *for* writing, in the metaphysical sense of these words. Nor is it *for* any third force, particularly any radicalism of the origin or

of the center. The values of *arché* and *telos*, along with the history and transcendentalism that are dependent upon them, constitute precisely the principal objects of this deconstructive critique. To repeat: "That is why it has never been a question of opposing a graphocentrism to a logocentrism, nor, in general, any center to any other center. . . . And even less a rehabilitation of what has always been called writing. It is not a question of returning to writing its rights, its superiority or its dignity . . ." [*Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 12.]. And, since it is necessary to insist: ". . . which amounts, of course, to reforming the concept of writing . . . oral language already belongs to this [generalized] writing. But that presupposes a modification of the concept of writing. . . . Phonologism does not brook any objections as long as one conserves the colloquial concepts of speech and writing which form the solid fabric of its argumentation. Colloquial and quotidian conceptions, inhabited besides—uncontradictorily enough—by an old history, limited by frontiers that are hardly visible yet all the more rigorous by that very fact" [*Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 55, 56].

It is thus an old word and an old concept of writing, along with all that is invested in it, that periodicals of every stripe have been claiming to turn against this critique, not without borrowing certain resources from it in their confusion. These reactions are obviously symptomatic and belong to a certain type. Freud recounts that when he was having trouble gaining acceptance for the possibility of masculine hysteria, he encountered, among those primary sorts of resistance which do not reveal mere foolishness or lack of culture, the resistance of a surgeon who *expressly* told him: "But, my dear colleague, how can you pronounce such absurdities? *Hysterion* (sic) signifies 'uterus.' How then can a man be hysterical?"

This example is not insignificant. But others could be cited as well: the presumed origin of a concept or the imagined etymology of a word have often been held up against the process of their transformation, without any regard for the fact that what was being utilized was precisely the vulgar sign most heavily overlaid with history and unconscious motivations.

This note, this reference, the choice of this example are placed here merely to herald a certain *out-of-placeness* of language: we are thus introduced into what is *supposed* to be found *behind* the hymen: the hystera (ὕστερα), which exposes itself only by transference and simulacrum—by mimicry.

9. TN. In French: L'ANTRE DE MALLARMÉ [Mallarmé's antre]

L' "ENTRE" DE MALLARMÉ [Mallarmé's "between" or "enter"]

L'ENTRE-DUEUX "MALLARME" [The go-between "Mallarmé" or "Mallarmé" between two, neither fish nor fowl]

10. TN. In French: L'hymen: ENTRE Platon et Mallarmé. [The Hymen or marriage: BETWEEN Plato and Mallarmé.] Why Latin? On the one hand, the Latin makes it clear that the word "hymen" is to be read both as "membrane" and as "marriage." It also establishes the word "inter" as a pivot for wordplays in which "between" is not playful enough. Then again, what is "between Plato and Mallarmé" if not precisely Latin? In using Latin to weasel out of a difficulty in translation, we thus, inadvertently but perhaps inevitably, find ourselves caught in one of the crucial hinges of Western philosophy: the textual rifts and drifts produced by the process of *translation* of the Greek philosophers, precisely, into Latin.

11. TN. In French: "Le causeur s'assied." This is a quotation from a lecture by Mallarmé composed in memory of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. The lecture begins: "A man accustomed to dreaming has come here to speak of another, who is dead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

*The Speaker takes his seat.*

Does anyone really know what writing is? . . ."

On the page that each of you has (see figure III), a short text by Mallarmé, *Mimique*,<sup>12</sup> is embedded in one corner, sharing or completing it, with a segment from the *Philebus*,<sup>13</sup> which, without actually naming *mimēsis*, illustrates the mimetic system and even defines it, let us say in anticipation, as a system of *illustration*.

What is the purpose of placing these two texts there, and of placing them in that way, at the opening of a question about what goes (on) or doesn't go (on) *between* [entre] literature and truth? That question will remain, like these two texts and like this mimodrama, a sort of epigraph to some future development, while the thing entitled surveys (from a great height) an event, of which we will still be obliged, at the end of the coming session, to point to the absence.

Because of a certain fold that we shall outline, these texts, and their commerce, definitively escape any exhaustive treatment. We can nevertheless begin to mark out, in a few rough strokes, a certain number of motifs. These strokes might be seen to form a sort of frame, the enclosure or borders of a history that would precisely be that of a certain play between literature and truth. The history of this relationship would be organized by—I won't say by *mimēsis*, a notion one should not hasten to translate (especially by imitation), but by a certain interpretation of *mimēsis*. Such an interpretation has never been the act or the speculative decision of any one author at a given moment, but rather, if one reconstitutes the system, the whole of a history. *Inter Platonem et Mallarmatum*, between Plato and Mallarmé—whose proper names, it should be understood, are not real references but indications for the sake of convenience and initial analysis—a whole history has taken place. This history was also a history of literature if one accepts the idea that literature was born of it and died of it, the certificate of its birth as such, the declaration of its name, having coincided with its disappearance, according to a logic that the hymen will help us define. And this history, if it has any meaning, is governed in its entirety by the value of truth and by a certain relation, inscribed in the hymen in question, *between* literature and truth. In saying "this history, if it has any meaning," one seems to be admitting that it might not. But if we were to go to the end of this analysis, we would see it

12. TN. *Mimique*: "1. Adj. (a) Mimic. *Language mimique*., (i) sign language; (ii) dumb show. (b) Z[oo]logy: Mimetic. 2. Subst. fem. (a) Mimic art; mimicry. (b) F[amiliar]: Dumb show." (Mansion's Shorter French and English Dictionary.)

13. TN. *Philebus*, trans. R. Hackforth, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 1118–19.

confirmed not only that this history has a meaning, but that the very concept of history has lived only upon the possibility of meaning, upon the past, present, or promised presence of meaning and of truth. Outside this system, it is impossible to resort to the concept of history without reinscribing it elsewhere, according to some specific systematic strategy.

True history, the history of meaning, is told in the *Philebus*. In rereading the scene you have before your eyes, you will have remarked four facets.

1. *The book is a dialogue or a dialectic.* At least it should be. The comparison of the soul to a book (*bibliōi*) comes up in such a way that the book appears only as a mode or instance of discourse (*logos*), namely, stilled, silent, internal discourse: not any "stilled ode" or "silence of an afternoon of music," as in *Mimique*, nor the "stilled voice," as in *Music and Letters*, but internalized speech. That is, in a word, thinking (*dianoia*) as it is defined in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*: "Well, thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound" (*Sophist*, 263e). " 'How do you describe that process of thinking (*dianoesthai*)?' 'As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. You must take this explanation as coming from an ignoramus, but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes or no' " (*Theaetetus*, 189e). According to the reasoning of the *Philebus*, first there was the *doxa*, the opinion, feeling, or evaluation that sprang up spontaneously within me and pertained to an appearance or semblance of truth, prior to any communication or discourse. Then when I proffered that *doxa* aloud, addressing it to a present interlocutor, it became discourse (*logos*). But from the instant this *logos* can have been formed, when the possibility of dialogue has come into being, it might happen, through an accident of circumstance, that I wouldn't have a partner handy: alone, then, I address this discourse to myself, I converse with myself in a sort of inward commerce. What I then hold is still a discourse but it is soundless, aphonic, private—which also means deprived: of its mouthpiece, its voice. Now, it is in connection with this deficient *logos*, this blank voice, this amputated dialogue—amputated of its vocal organ as well as of its other—that Socrates resorts to the "metaphor" of the book. Our soul then resembles a book not only for the obvious reason that it is a kind of *logos* and dialogue (and the book is thus only a species within the genus "dialogue"), but particularly because this reduced or mumbled conversation remains a false dialogue, a minor interchange, equivalent to a loss of voice. In this dialogue that has

run out of voice, the need for the book or for writing in the soul is only felt through lack of the presence of the other, through lack of any employment of the voice: the object is to reconstitute the presence of the other by substitution, and by the same token to repair the vocal apparatus. The metaphorical book thus has all the characteristics that, until Mallarmé, have always been assigned to the book, however these might have been belied by literary practice. The book, then, stands as a substitute for dialogue, as it calls itself, as it calls itself alive.

2. *The truth of the book is decidable.* This false dialogue constituted by the book is not necessarily a dialogue that is false. The psychic *volumen*, the book within the soul, can either be true or false according as the writer in us (*par hēmin grammateus*) says and, as a direct consequence, writes down things that are true or false. The value of the book as flattened-out *logos* is a function of, in proportion to, in a ratio (also *logos*) with, its truth. "When the internal scribe that I have suggested writes what is false we get the opposite sort of opinions and assertions." Psychic writing must in the last instance appear before the tribunal of dialectics and ontology. It is only worth its weight in truth, and truth is its sole standard of measurement. It is through recourse to the truth of that which is, of things as such, that one can always decide whether writing is or is not true, whether it is in conformity or in "opposition" to the true.

3. *The value of the book (true/false) is not intrinsic to it.* A span of writing is worth nothing in itself; it is neither good nor bad, neither true nor false. This proposal of neutrality (neither/nor), when exported outside the Platonic context, can have some surprising effects, as we shall see in a moment. But as for the Platonic book, its truth or falsity only declares itself at the moment the writer transcribes an inner speech, when he copies into the book a discourse that has already taken place and stands in a certain relation of truth (of similarity) or falsity (dissimilarity) with things in themselves. If one steps outside the metaphorical instance of the book, one can say that the writer transcribes into the outer book, into the book in what is called its "proper" meaning, what he has previously engraved upon his psychic shell. It is with respect to that primary engraving that it is necessary to divide between the true and the false. The book, which copies, reproduces, imitates living discourse, is worth only as much as that discourse is worth. It can be worth less, to the extent that it is bereft of the *life* of *logos*; it can't be worth more. In this way, writing *in general* is interpreted as an imitation, a duplicate of the living voice or present *logos*. Writing in general is not, of

course, literary writing. But elsewhere, in the *Republic*, for example, poets are only judged and condemned for being imitators, mimes that do not practice "simple diegesis." The specific place of the poet can as such be judged according to whether or not he makes use, and in this or that way, of mimetic form.<sup>14</sup> The kind of poetry whose case is thus being heard cannot,

14. It is not possible for us to examine here the extremely complex system of Plato's concept of *mimēsis*. We will attempt elsewhere ("Between Two Throws of Dice") to reconstitute its network and its "logic" around three focal points.

a. *The double parricide/The parricidal double*. Homer, toward whom Plato directs numerous signs of filial respect, admiration, and gratitude, is cast out of the city, like every other mimetic poet, with all honors due to a being who is "holy and wondrous" (*hieron kai thaumaston*) (*Republic*, 398a), when he isn't being asked to "erase" from his text all the politically dangerous passages (386c). Homer, the blind old father, is condemned because he *practices* mimesis (or mimetic, rather than simple, diegesis). The other father, Parmenides, is condemned because he *neglects* mimesis. If violence must be done to *him*, it is because his *logos*, the "paternal thesis," would prohibit (one from accounting for) the proliferation of doubles ("idols, icons, likenesses, semblances"). The necessity for this parricide, we are told in this very connection (*Sophist* 241d–e), ought to be plain enough for even the blind (*tuphlōi*) to see.

b. *The double inscription of mimēsis*. It is impossible to pin *mimēsis* down to a binary classification or, more precisely, to assign a single place to the *technē mimētikē* within the "division" set forth in the *Sophist* (at the point at which a method and a paradigm are being sought in an effort to hunt down the Sophist in an organized manner). The mimetic form is *both* one of the three forms of "productive or creative art" (*technē poiētikē*) and, on the other branch of the fork, a form or procedure belonging among the acquisitive arts (*kiētikē*) (nonproductive, nonpoetic) used by the Sophist in his hunt for rich young men (218d–233bff). As a "wizard and imitator," the Sophist is capable of "producing" "likenesses and homonyms" of everything that exists (234b–235a). The Sophist mimes the poetic, which nevertheless itself comprises the mimetic; he produces production's double. But just at the point of capture, the Sophist still eludes his pursuers through a supplementary division, extended toward a vanishing point, between two forms of the mimetic (235d): the making of likenesses (the *eikastic*) or faithful reproduction, and the making of semblances (the *fantastic*), which simulates the eikastic, pretending to simulate faithfully and deceiving the eye with a simulacrum (a phantasm), which constitutes "a very extensive class, in painting (*zōgraphia*) and in imitation of all sorts." This is an aporia (236e) for the philosophical hunter, who comes to a stop before this bifurcation, incapable of continuing to track down his quarry; it is an endless escape route for that quarry (who is also a hunter), who will turn up again, after a long detour, in the direction of Mallarmé's *Mimique*. This mimodrama and the *double science* arising from it will have concerned only a certain obliterated history of the relations between philosophy and sophistics.

c. *Mimēsis, guilty or not guilty*. If we go back to *mimēsis* "prior" to the philosophical "decision," we find that Plato, far from linking the destiny of art and poetry to the structure of *mimēsis* (or rather to the structure of all of what people today often translate—in order to reject it—as re-presentation, imitation, expression, reproduction, etc.), disqualifies in *mimēsis* everything that "modernity" makes much of: the mask, the disappearance of the author, the simulacrum, anonymity, apocryphal textuality. This can be verified by rereading the passage in *The Republic* on simple narration and mimesis (393a ff). What is important for our purposes here is this "internal" duplicity of the *mimēsthai* that Plato wants to cut in two, in order to separate good *mimēsis* (which reproduces faithfully and truly yet is already

of course, be simply identified with what we call "literature." If, as we have precisely been tempted to think, literature is born/dead of a relatively recent break, it is nonetheless true that the whole history of the interpretation of the arts of letters has moved and been transformed within the diverse logical possibilities opened up by the concept of *mimēsis*. These are numerous, paradoxical, and disconcerting enough to have unleashed a rich system of combinations and permutations. Here is not the place for us to demonstrate this. Let us retain the schematic law that structures Plato's discourse: he is obliged sometimes to condemn *mimēsis* in itself as a process of duplication, whatever its model might be,<sup>15</sup> and sometimes to disqualify *mimēsis* only in function of the model that is "imitated," the mimetic operation in itself remaining neutral, or even advisable.<sup>16</sup> But in both cases, *mimēsis* is lined up alongside truth: either it hinders the unveiling of the thing itself by substituting a copy or double for what is; or else it works in the service of truth through the double's resemblance (*homoioōsis*). *Logos*, which is itself imitated by writing, only has value as truth; it is under this heading that Plato always interrogates it.

4. And finally, a fourth trait, to finish out the frame of this text: the element of the thus characterized book is the *image* in general (the icon or phantasm), the imaginary or the *imaginal*. If Socrates is able to *compare* the silent relation between the soul and itself, in the "mute soliloquy" (*Mimi-*

threatened by the simple fact of its duplication) from bad, which must be contained like madness (396a) and (harmful) play (396e).

Here is an outline of this "logic": 1. *Mimēsis* produces a thing's double. If the double is faithful and perfectly like, no qualitative difference separates it from the model. Three consequences of this: (a) The double—the imitator—is nothing, is worth nothing in itself. (b) Since the imitator's value comes only from its model, the imitator is good when the model is good, and bad when the model is bad. In itself it is neutral and transparent. (c) If *mimēsis* is nothing and is worth nothing in itself, then it is nothing in value and being—it is in itself negative. Therefore it is an evil: to imitate is bad in itself and not just when what is imitated is bad. 2. Whether like or unlike, the imitator is something, since *mimēsis* and likenesses do exist. Therefore this nonbeing does "exist" in some way (*The Sophist*). Hence: (a) in adding to the model, the imitator comes as a supplement and ceases to be a nothing or a nonvalue. (b) In adding to the "existing" model, the imitator is not the same thing, and even if the resemblance were absolute, the resemblance is never absolute (*Cratylus*). And hence never absolutely true. (c) As a supplement that can take the model's place but never be its equal, the imitator is in essence inferior even at the moment it replaces the model and is thus "promoted." This schema (two propositions and six possible consequences) forms a kind of logical machine; it programs the prototypes of all the propositions inscribed in Plato's discourse as well as those of the whole tradition. According to a complex but implacable law, this machine deals out all the clichés of criticism to come.

15. *Republic*, 395b–c and passim.

16. *Ibid.* 396c–d.

que), to a book, it is because the book imitates the soul or the soul imitates the book, because each is the image or *likeness* of the other ("image" has the same root as "imitari"). Both of these likenesses, even before resembling each other, were in themselves already reproductive, imitative, and pictorial (in the representative sense of the word) in essence. *Logos* must indeed be shaped according to the model of the *eidos*; <sup>17</sup> the book then reproduces the *logos*, and the whole is organized by this relation of repetition, resemblance (*homoiōsis*), doubling, duplication, this sort of specular process and play of reflections where things (*onta*), speech, and writing come to repeat and mirror each other.

As of this point, the appearance of the painter is prescribed and becomes absolutely ineluctable. The way is paved for it in the scene from the *Philebus*. This other "demiurge," the *zōgraphos*, comes *after* the *grammateus*: "a painter, who comes after the writer and paints in the soul pictures of these assertions that we make." This collusion between painting (*zōgraphia*) and writing is, of course, constant. Both in Plato and after him. But painting and writing can only be images of each other to the extent that they are both interpreted as images, reproductions, representations, or repetitions of something alive, of living speech in the one case, and of animal figures in the other (*zōgraphia*). Any discourse about the relationship between literature and truth always bumps up against the enigmatic possibility of repetition, within the framework of the *portrait*.

What, in fact, is the painter doing here? He too is painting metaphorically, of course, and in the soul, just like the *grammateus*. But he comes along after the latter, retraces his steps, follows his traces and his trail. And he *illustrates* a book that is already written when he appears on the scene. He "paints in the soul pictures of these assertions." Sketching, painting, the art of space, the practice of spacing, the inscription written inside the outside (the outwork [*hors-livre*]), all these are only things that are added,

17. After showing in the *Cratylus* that nomination excluded *mimēsis*, that the form of a word could not, mimelike, resemble the form of a thing (423a ff), Socrates nevertheless maintains that, through another sort of resemblance, a non-sensible sort, the right name could be taken as an image of the thing in its "truth" (439a ff). And this thesis is not carried off in the ironic oscillations of the *Cratylus*. The priority of what is, in its truth, over language, like the priority of a model over its image, is as unshakable as absolute certainty. "Let us suppose that to any extent you please you can learn things through the medium of names, and suppose also that you can learn them from the things themselves. Which is likely to be the nobler and clearer way—to learn of the image (*ek tēs eikonas*), whether the image and the truth of which the image is the expression have been rightly conceived, or to learn of the truth (*ek tēs alētheias*) whether the truth and the image of it have been duly executed? . . . We may admit so such, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No, they must be studied and investigated in themselves" (trans. B. Jowett).



for the sake of illustration, representation, or decoration, to the book of the discourse of the thinking of the innermost man. The painting that shapes the images is a portrait of the discourse; it is worth only as much as the discourse it fixes and freezes along its surface. And consequently, it is also worth only as much as the *logos* capable of interpreting it, of reading it, of saying what it is-trying-to-say and what in truth it is being made to say through the reanimation that makes it speak.

But painting, that degenerate and somewhat superfluous expression, that supplementary frill of discursive thought, that ornament of *dianoia* and *logos*, also plays a role that seems to be just the opposite of this. It functions as a pure indicator of the essence of a thought or discourse defined as image, representation, repetition. If *logos* is first and foremost a faithful image of the *eidos* (the figure of intelligible visibility) of what is, then it arises as a sort of primary painting, profound and invisible. In that case painting in its usual sense, a painter's painting, is really only the painting of a painting. Hence it can reveal the essential picturality, the representativity, of *logos*. That is indeed the task assigned by Socrates to the *zōgraphos-dēmiourgos* in the *Philebus*: "How do we make out that he in his turn acts, and when?" asks Protarchus, and Socrates replies, "When we have got those opinions and assertions clear of the act of sight (*opseōs*), or other sense, and as it were see in ourselves pictures or images of what we previously opined or asserted." The painter who works after the writer, the worker who shapes his work after opinion and assertion, the artisan who follows the artist, is able, through an exercise of analysis, separation, and impoverishment, precisely to purify the pictorial, imitative, imaginal essence of thought. The painter, then, knows how to restore the naked image of the thing, the image as it presents itself to simple intuition, as it shows itself in its intelligible *eidos* or sensible *horaton*. He strips it of all that superadded language, of that legend that now has the status of a commentary, of an envelope around a kernel, of an epidermic canvas.

So that in psychic writing, between the *zōgraphia* and the *logos* (or *dianoia*) there exists a very strange relation: one is always the supplement of the other. In the first part of the scene, the thought that directly fixed the essence of things did not essentially need the illustrative ornament that writing and painting constituted. The soul's thinking was only intimately linked to *logos* (and to the proffered or held-back voice). Inversely, a bit further on, painting (in the metaphorical sense of psychic painting, of course, just as a moment ago it was a question of psychic writing) is what gives us the image of the thing itself, what communicates to us the direct intuition, the immediate vision of the thing, freed from the discourse that

accompanied it, or even encumbered it. Naturally, I would like to stress once more, it is always the *metaphors* of painting and writing that are linked in this way back and forth: we recall that, on another plane, outside these metaphors, Plato always asserts that in their literal sense painting and writing are totally incapable of any intuition of the thing itself, since they only deal in copies, and in copies of copies.

If discourse and inscription (writing-painting) thus appear alternately as useful complements or as useless supplements to each other, now useful, now useless, now in one sense, now in another, this is because they are forever intertwined together within the tissue of the following complicities or reversibilities:

1. They are both measured against the truth they are capable of.
2. They are images of each other and that is why one can replace [*suppléer*] the other when the other is lacking.
3. Their common structure makes them both partake of *mnēmē* and *mimēsis*, of *mnēmē* precisely by dint of participating in *mimēsis*. Within the movement of the *mimēsthai*, the relation of the mime to the mimed, of the reproducer to the reproduced, is always a relation to a *past present*. The imitated comes before the imitator. Whence the problem of time, which indeed does not fail to come up: Socrates wonders whether it would be out of the question to think that *grammata* and *zōgraphēmata* might have a relation to the future. The difficulty lies in conceiving that what is imitated could be still to come with respect to what imitates, that the image can precede the model, that the double can come before the simple. The overtures of "hope" (*elpis*), anamnesis (the future as a past present due to return), the preface, the anterior future (future perfect), all come to arrange things.<sup>18</sup>

It is here that the value of *mimēsis* is most difficult to master. A certain movement effectively takes place in the Platonic text, a movement one should not be too quick to call contradictory. On the one hand, as we have

18. Nothing in the above-mentioned logical program was to change when, following Aristotle, and particularly during the "age of classicism," the models for imitation were to be found not simply in nature but in the works and writers of Antiquity that had known how to imitate nature. One could find a thousand examples up to the Romantics (including the Romantics and often those well after them). Diderot, who nevertheless so powerfully solicited the mimetological "machine," especially in *Le Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, confirms upon the analysis of what he calls the "ideal imagined model" (supposedly non-Platonic) that all manner of reversals are included in the program. And, as for the logic of the future perfect: "Antoine Coypel was certainly a man of wit when he recommended to his fellow artists: 'Let us paint, if we can, in such a way that the figures in our paintings will be the living models of the ancient statues rather than that those statues be the originals of the figures we paint.' The same advice could be given to literati" ("*Pensées détachées sur la peinture*," in *Oeuvres esthétiques*, Garnier, ed. Vernière, p. 816).

just verified, it is hard to separate *mnēmē* from *mimēsis*. But on the other hand, while Plato often discredits *mimēsis* and almost always disqualifies the mimetic arts, he never separates the unveiling of truth, *alētheia*, from the movement of *anamnēsia* (which is, as we have seen, to be distinguished from *hypomnēsia*).

What announces itself here is an internal division within *mimēsis*, a self-duplication of repetition itself; *ad infinitum*, since this movement feeds its own proliferation. Perhaps, then, there is always more than one kind of *mimēsis*; and perhaps it is in the strange mirror that reflects but also displaces and distorts one *mimēsis* into the other, as though it were itself destined to mime or mask *itself*, that history—the history of literature—is lodged, along with the whole of its interpretation. Everything would then be played out in the paradoxes of the supplementary double: the paradoxes of something that, added to the simple and the single, replaces and mimes them, both like and unlike, unlike because it is—in that it is—like, the same as and different from what it duplicates. Faced with all this, what does “Platonism” decide and maintain? (“Platonism” here standing more or less immediately for the whole history of Western philosophy, including the anti-Platonisms that regularly feed into it.) What is it that is decided and maintained in ontology or dialectics throughout all the mutations or revolutions that are entailed? It is precisely the *ontological*: the presumed possibility of a discourse about what is, the deciding and decidable *logos* of or about the *on* (being-present). That which is, the being-present (the matrix-form of substance, of reality, of the oppositions between matter and form, essence and existence, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.) is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon, etc., that is, from anything that, presenting it *as* being-present, doubles it, re-presents it, and can therefore replace and de-present it. There is thus the 1 and the 2, the simple and the double. The double comes *after* the simple; it multiplies it as a *follow-up*. It follows, I apologize for repeating this, that the image *supervenes* upon reality, the representation upon the present in presentation, the imitation upon the thing, the imitator upon the imitated. First there is what is, “reality,” the thing itself, in flesh and blood as the phenomenologists say; then there is, imitating these, the painting, the portrait, the zographeme, the inscription or transcription of the thing itself. Discernability, at least numerical discernability, between the imitator and the imitated is what constitutes order. And obviously, according to “logic” itself, according to a profound synonymy, what is imitated is more real, more essential, more true, etc., than what imitates. It is anterior and superior to it. One should constantly bear in mind, henceforth, the clinical

paradigm of *mimēsis*, the order of the three beds in the *Republic* X (596a ff): the painter's, the carpenter's, and God's.

Doubtless this order will appear to be contested, even inverted, in the course of history, and on several occasions. But never have the absolute distinguishability between imitated and imitator, and the anteriority of the first over the second, been displaced by any metaphysical system. In the domain of "criticism" or poetics, it has been strongly stressed that art, as imitation (representation, description, expression, imagination, etc.), should not be "slavish" (this proposition scans twenty centuries of poetics) and that consequently, through the liberties it takes with nature, art can create or produce works that are more valuable than what they imitate. But all these derivative oppositions send us back to the same root. The extra-value or the extra-being makes art a richer kind of nature, freer, more pleasant, more creative: more natural. At the time of the great systematization of the classical doctrine of imitation, Desmaret, in his *Art of Poetry*, translates a then rather common notion:

And Art enchants us more than nature does. . . .

Not liking what is imitated, we yet love what imitates.

Whether one or the other is preferred (but it could easily be shown that because of the nature of the imitated/imitator relation, the *preference*, whatever one might say, can only go to the imitated), it is at bottom this order of appearance, the precedence [*pré-séance*] of the imitated, that governs the philosophical or critical interpretation of "literature," if not the operation of literary writing. This order of appearance is *the order of all appearance*, the very process of appearing in general. It is the order of truth. "Truth" has always meant two different things, the history of the essence of truth—the truth of truth—being only the gap and the articulation between the two interpretations or processes. To simplify the analyses made by Heidegger but without necessarily adopting the order of succession that he seems to recognize, one can retain the fact that the process of truth is *on the one hand* the unveiling of what lies concealed in oblivion (*alētheia*), the veil lifted or raised [*relevé*] from the thing itself, from that which *is* insofar as it is, presents itself, produces itself, and can even exist in the form of a determinable hole in Being; *on the other hand* (but this other process is prescribed in the first, in the ambiguity or duplicity of the presence of the present, of its *appearance*—that which appears *and* its appearing—in the *fold* of the present participle),<sup>19</sup> truth is agreement (*homoiōsis* or *adaequatio*), a relation of

19. Cf. Heidegger, "Moirā," in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. D. F. Krell and F. A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

resemblance or equality between a re-presentation and a thing (unveiled, present), even in the eventuality of a statement of judgment.

Now, *mimesis*, all through the history of its interpretation, is always commanded by the process of truth:

1. either, even before it can be translated as imitation, *mimēsis* signifies the presentation of the thing itself, of nature, of the *physis* that produces itself, engenders itself, and appears (to itself) as it really is, in the presence of its image, its visible aspect, its face: the theatrical mask, as one of the essential references of the *mimēsthai*, reveals as much as it hides. *Mimēsis* is then the movement of the *physis*, a movement that is somehow natural (in the nonderivative sense of this word), through which the *physis*, having no outside, no other, must be doubled in order to make its appearance, to appear (to itself), to produce (itself), to unveil (itself); in order to emerge from the crypt where it prefers itself; in order to shine in its *alētheia*. In this sense, *mnēmē* and *mimēsis* are on a par, since *mnēmē* too is an unveiling (an un-forgetting), *alētheia*.

2. or else *mimēsis* sets up a relation of *homoiōsis* or *adaequatio* between two (terms). In that case it can more readily be translated as imitation. This translation seeks to express (or rather historically produces) the thought about this relation. The two faces are separated and set face to face: the imitator and the imitated, the latter being none other than the thing or the meaning of the thing itself, its manifest presence. A good imitation will be one that is true, faithful, like or likely, adequate, in conformity with the *physis* (essence or life) of what is imitated; it effaces itself of its own accord in the process of restoring freely, and hence in a living manner, the freedom of true presence.

In each case, *mimēsis* has to follow the process of truth. The presence of the present is its norm, its order, its law. It is in the name of truth, its only reference—reference itself—that *mimēsis* is judged, proscribed or prescribed according to a regular alternation.

The invariable feature of this reference sketches out the closure of metaphysics: not as a border enclosing some homogeneous space but according to a noncircular, entirely other, figure. Now, this reference is discreetly but absolutely displaced in the workings of a certain syntax, whenever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke. This double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts. This displacement does not take place, has not taken place once, as an *event*. It does not occupy a simple place. It does not take place *in* writing. This dis-location (is what) writes/is written. This redou-

bling of the mark, which is at once a formal break and a formal generalization, is exemplified by the text of Mallarmé, and singularly by the "sheet" you have before your eyes (but obviously every word of this last proposition must by the same token be displaced or placed under suspicion).

Let us reread *Mimique*. Near the center, there is a sentence in quotation marks. It is not a citation, as we shall see, but the simulacrum of a citation or explicitation:—"The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action . . ."

This is a trap: one might well be tempted to interpret this sentence and the sequence that follows from it in a very classical way, as an "idealist" reversal of traditional mimetology. One would then say: of course, the mime does not imitate any actual thing or action, any reality that is already given in the world, existing before and outside his own sphere; he doesn't have to conform, with an eye toward verisimilitude, to some real or external model, to some *nature*, in the most belated sense of the word. But the relation of imitation and the value of adequation remain intact since it is still necessary to imitate, represent, or "illustrate" the idea. But what is the idea? one would proceed to ask. What is the ideality of the idea? When it is no longer the *ontōs on* in the form of the thing itself, it is, to speak in a post-Cartesian manner, the copy inside me, the representation of the thing through thought, the ideality—for a subject—of what is. In this sense, whether one conceives it in its "Cartesian" or in its "Hegelian" modification, the idea is the presence of what is, and we aren't yet out of Platonism. It is still a matter of imitating (expressing, describing, representing, illustrating) an *eidos* or *idea*, whether it is a figure of the thing itself, as in Plato, a subjective representation, as in Descartes, or both, as in Hegel.

Of course. Mallarmé's text can be read this way and reduced to a brilliant literary idealism. The frequent use of the word *Idea*—often enlarged and hypostatized by a capital letter—and the story of the author's supposed Hegelianism tend to invite such a reading. And that invitation has rarely gone unanswered. But a reading here should no longer be carried out as a simple table of concepts or words, as a static or statistical sort of punctuation. One must reconstitute a chain in motion, the effects of a network and the play of a syntax. In that case *Mimique* can be read quite differently than as a neo-idealism or a neo-mimetologism. The system of *illustration* is altogether different there than in the *Philebus*. With the values that must be associated with it, the *lustre* is reinscribed in a completely other place.

There is no imitation. The Mime imitates nothing. And to begin with, he doesn't imitate. There is nothing prior to the writing of his gestures. Nothing is prescribed for him. No present has preceded or supervised the tracing of his writing. His movements form a figure that no speech

anticipates or accompanies. They are not linked with *logos* in any order of consequence. "*Such is this PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE composed and set down by himself, a mute soliloquy . . .*"

"Composed and set down by himself . . ." We here enter a textual labyrinth panelled with mirrors. The Mime *follows* no preestablished script, no program obtained elsewhere. Not that he improvises or lets himself go spontaneously: he simply does not obey any verbal order. His gestures, his gestural writing (and Mallarmé's insistence on describing the regulated gesture of dance or pantomime as a hieroglyphic inscription is legendary), are not dictated by any verbal discourse or imposed by any diction. The Mime inaugurates; he breaks into a white page: ". . . *a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul.*"

The blank—the other face of this double session here declares its white color—extends between the candid virginity ("*fragments of candor*" . . . "*nuptial proofs of the Idea*") of the white (*candida*) page and the white paint of the pale Pierrot who, by simulacrum, writes in the paste of his own make-up, upon the page he is. Through all the surfaces superimposed white on white, between all the layers of Mallarméan make-up, one comes across, every time, on analysis, the substance of some "*drowned grease paint*" (*The Chastised Clown* [*Le Pitre châtié*]). One can read, each within the other, the Pierrot of *Mimique* and the "*bad Hamlet*" of the *Chastised Clown* ("*Eyes, lakes with my simple intoxication of rebirth / Other than as the histrion who with a gesture evoked / As a quill the smoking lamps' ignoble soot, / I pierced a window in the canvas wall*"). Pierrot is brother to all the Hamlets haunting the Mallarméan text. If one takes account of the crime, incest, or suicide in which they are all simultaneously engaged, then it is, in the form of an I or A, the ghost of a castrated point, quill, or stick that lies therein whetting its threats. To prove this, one must go through several relays, that of all signifiers containing -IQUE, for example, and this we shall not fail to do.

The Mime is not subjected to the authority of any book: the fact that Mallarmé points this out is all the more strange since the text called *Mimique* is initially a reaction to a reading. Mallarmé had earlier had the booklet of the mimodrama in his hands, and it is this little work that he is at first commenting upon. We know this because Mallarmé had published the first version of this text, without its title, in the November 1886 issue of *La Revue indépendante*. In place of what was to become the first paragraph of *Mimique*, one could read this in particular: "A type of luxury not inferior to any gala seems to me to be, during the treacherous season all with its calls to go out, the setting aside, under the first lamp, of an evening at home for

reading. The suggestive and truly rare booklet that opens in my hands is none other, in sum, than a pantomime booklet: *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife . . .*" (Published by Calmann-Lévy, new edition, 1886).<sup>20</sup>

It is thus in a booklet, upon a page, that Mallarmé must have read the effacement of the booklet before the gestural initiative of the Mime. That,

20. The editors of the Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's works have not deemed necessary to point out, in their "Notes et Variantes," that the text printed in *La Revue indépendante*, which was part of a much longer sequence, did not carry the title *Mimique*, and that the paragraph we have just quoted and broken off at the same point as the Pléiade editors was followed by a paragraph which, both in vocabulary and syntax, was quite different from the second paragraph of *Mimique*. Contrary to the rule observed for other texts, those editors have not included the variants from the second version, published in *Pages* (Brussels, 1891) in the chapter called "Le Genre ou des Modernes," still without a title. *Mimique* is a third version, published under that title in *Divagations* (1897), in the series called *Crayonné au théâtre*. When the Pléiade editors, after quoting two paragraphs from the *Revue indépendante* (up to *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife . . .*), go on to add: "These two paragraphs, in *Pages* (1891), were part (p. 135–36) of the chapter 'le Genre ou des Modernes.' They also appeared in *Divagations*, p. 186," this description is both incomplete and inexact. If we have chosen to reproduce here the two earlier versions, it is because the transformation of each paragraph (in certain of its words, its syntax, its punctuation, its play of parentheses and italics, etc.) displays the economy of the "syntaxer" at work; and also because, at the proper moment, we will draw from them certain specific lessons.

a. *La Revue indépendante* (1886) (immediately following the passage we have quoted in the body of the text) . . . "a pantomime booklet: *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife*, composed and set down by M. Paul Margueritte. A monomime, rather, I would say along with the author, before the tacit soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to himself. A whirlwind of delicate new thoughts emanates, which I would like to seize upon with security, and say. The entire esthetic there of a genre situated closer to principles than any other! nothing in this region of fantasy being able to foil the direct simplifying instinct. This: 'The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, through a hymen out of which flows Dream, tainted with vice, yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present. This is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion: not otherwise does he set up a pure medium of fiction.' This marvelous bit of nothing, less than a thousand lines, whoever will read it as I have just done, will comprehend the eternal rules, just as though facing the stageboards, their humble depository. The surprise, which is also charming, caused by the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences, is that, in this sole case perhaps with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye silence is established, the delight of reading."

b. *Pages* (1891). "Silence, sole luxury after rhymes, an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with dusk and cadence, the detail of its signification on a par with a stilled ode and which it is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate! the silence that I have sought ever since from afternoons of music, I have also found with contentment before the reappearance, always as original as himself, of Pierrot, that is, of the bright and sagacious mime, Paul Legrand. [This paragraph can now be found in *Crayonné au théâtre*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 340.]

"Such is this *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife* composed and set down by M. Paul Margueritte, a tacit soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to himself. A whirlwind of naïve or new thoughts emanates, which it would be pleasing to seize upon with security, and say. The entire esthetic of a genre situated closer to principles than any other! nothing in this region of fantasy being able to foil the



direct simplifying spirit. This: 'The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, through a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion: not otherwise does he set up a pure medium of fiction.' This tole, less than a thousand lines, whoever reads it will comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards, their humble depository. The surprise, too, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences, is that, in this sole case perhaps with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye is established this silence, the delight of reading."

On comparing these three versions, we can draw a first conclusion: the sentence in quotation marks is indeed a simulacrum of a citation—an expli-citation, rather—an impersonal, concise, solemn statement, a kind of illustrious rule, an anonymous axiom or law of unknown origin. Aside from the fact that such a "citation" is nowhere to be found (particularly among the different booklets, prefaces, and notes), the fact that it changes slightly in the course of the three versions would suffice to prove that we are dealing with a Mallarméan fiction. Its syntax should already have suggested as much.

It is not impossible that, several years earlier, Mallarmé had *also* attended a performance by this *Pierrot*. The second edition, the "rare booklet" to which *Mimique* is responding, was indeed accompanied by the following Notice, signed by Paul Margueritte himself: "In 1881, the amusement afforded by a theatrical performance in the country, an unexpected success in the role of Pierrot, beneath the white mask and in Deburau's costume, made me suddenly become enamoured of pantomime, and write and act out, among other scenarios, this one: PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE. Having never seen a mime, Paul Legrand or Rouff, or read anything concerning this special art, I was ignorant of all traditions. I thus came up with a personal Pierrot, in conformity with my innermost esthetic self. As I sensed him and translated him, it seems, he was a modern being, neurotic, tragic, and ghostly. For lack of the proper sideshow stage, I was prevented from going on with this eccentric vocation, this veritable artistic madness that had gripped me, to which I owed certain singular personality-sheddings, strange nervous sensations, and, on the mornings after, some cerebral intoxications like those one gets from hashish. Unknown, a beginner in the world of letters, without any supporting cast or Columbine, I modestly performed a few monomimes in drawing-rooms and for the general public. Poets and artists judged my attempts curious and new: MM. Léon Cladel, Stéphane Mallarmé, J. K. Huysmans, and M. Théodore de Banville, who, in a letter sparkling with wit, tried to dissuade me, alleging that the worldly public was too . . . witty, and that the heyday of pantomime had past. *Amen*. If anything is left of my mimic efforts, it is the literary conception of a modern, suggestive Pierrot, donning at will the flowing classical costume or the tight black suit, and moving about in uneasiness and fear. This idea, set down in a little pantomime,\* was one I later developed in a novel,\*\* and I intend to use it again in two volumes that will be: a study of artistic sensations, and a collection of pantomimes. *Henceforth I should be allowed to emphasize the dates of my works*. My cup is small, but I drink it all. It would be unjust if my forthcoming books should seem to be inspired by someone else, and if I should be accused of imitation or plagiarism. Ideas belong to everyone. I am convinced that it is by mere coincidence that following PIERROT MURDERER OF HIS WIFE there should have appeared a work with a similar title and that after the character of Paul Violas in ALL FOUR there should follow a Pierrot reminiscent of him. I am just affirming my priority and reserving it for the future. This granted, the affection I feel toward the pretty art of pantomime, for Pierrrots—Willette's Album, Huysmans' *Skeptical Pierrot*, and Hennique—induces me to applaud any effort that will resuscitate, on stage or in a book, our friend Pierrot." (\**Pierrot Murderer of his Wife*, 1882, Schmidt, Printer. \*\**All Four*, a novel, 1885, ed. Giraud.)

This lengthy quotation is also of interest in that it marks the historical complexity of the textual network in which we are already engaged and in which Margueritte declares his claim to originality.

in fact, is a structural necessity, marked in the text of *Mimique*. Whether Mallarmé ever did actually go to see the "spectacle" too is not only hard to verify but irrelevant to the organization of the text.

What Mallarmé read, then, in this little book is a prescription that *effaces itself through its very existence*, the order given to the Mime to imitate nothing that in any way preexists his operation: neither an act ("*the scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action*") nor a word ("*stilled ode . . . mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul*").

In the beginning of this mime was neither the deed nor the word. It is prescribed (we will define this word in a moment) to the Mime that he not let anything be prescribed to him but his own writing, that he not reproduce by imitation any action (*pragma*: affair, thing, act) or any speech (*logos*: word, voice, discourse). The Mime ought only to write himself on the white page he is; he must *himself* inscribe *himself* through gestures and plays of facial expressions. At once page and quill, Pierrot is both passive and active, matter and form, the author, the means, and the raw material of his mimodrama. The histrion produces himself here. Right here—"A *veracious histrion was I of myself!*" (p. 495).

Before we investigate this proposition, let us consider what Mallarmé is doing in *Mimique*. We read *Mimique*. Mallarmé (he who fills the function of "author") writes upon a white page on the basis of a text he is reading in which it is written that one must write upon a white page. One could nevertheless point out that while the referent indicated by Mallarmé is not a spectacle he actually perceived, it is at least a "real" object called a booklet, which Mallarmé could see, the brochure he has before his eyes or in his hands (since he says so: "*The suggestive and truly rare booklet that opens in my hands*"), which is firmly maintained in its self-identity.

Let us see, since we must see, this little book. What Mallarmé has in his hands is a second edition, issued four years after the first, five years after the performance itself. The author's Note has replaced the Preface by a certain Fernand Beissier. The latter had described what he had *seen*: in the barn of an old farm, in the midst of a crowd of workers and peasants, a *mimodrama*—with no entry fee—of which he gives an outline after having described the setting at length. An inebriated Pierrot, "white, long, emaciated," enters with an undertaker. "And the drama began. For it truly was a drama we attended, a brutal, bizarre drama that burned the brain like one of Hoffmann's fantastic tales, atrocious at times, making one suffer like a veritable nightmare. Pierrot, who remains alone, tells how he has killed Columbine who had been unfaithful to him. He has just buried her, and no one will

ever know of his crime. He had tied her to the bed while she was asleep, and he had tickled her feet until a horrible, ghastly death burst upon her amongst those atrocious bursts of laughter. Only this long white Pierrot with his cadaverous face could have come up with the idea of this torture fit for the damned. And, miming the action, he represented before us the whole scene, simulating the victim and the murderer by turns."

Beissier describes the reaction of the audience and wonders what sort of reception Paris would give this "bizarre, tormented, bony Pierrot who seems to be slightly neurotic" ("This destroyed all my ideas about that legendary Pierrot who once made me laugh so hard . . ."). The next day, he tells us, he meets the Mime who has "become a man of the world again": it is Paul Margueritte, the brother of Victor Margueritte, the son of the general, Mallarmé's cousin. He asks Beissier to write a Preface to the booklet of *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife* which he, Paul Margueritte, intends to write and publish. That is exactly what has happened. The Preface is dated "Valvins [where Mallarmé had a vacation house.—Trans.], September 15, 1882": it is thus not improbable that Mallarmé, linked to the enterprise in all these ways, might have attended the performance and read the first edition of the booklet.

The temporal and textual structure of the "thing" (what shall we call it?) presents itself, for the time being, thus: a mimodrama "takes place," as a gestural writing preceded by no booklet; a preface is planned and then written *after* the "event" to precede a booklet written *after the fact*, reflecting the mimodrama rather than programming it. This Preface is replaced four years later by a Note written by the "author" himself, a sort of floating outwork [*hors-livre*].

Such is the object that is supposed to have served as Mallarmé's supposed "referent." What was it, then, that he had in his hands, before his eyes? At what point? in what now? along what line?

We have not yet opened the booklet "itself." The textual machination derives its complexity first of all from the fact that this little book, a verbal text aligning words and sentences, describes retrospectively a purely gestural, silent sequence, the inauguration of a writing of the body. This discrepancy or heterogeneity in the signifier is remarked upon by Margueritte in an N.B. After the physical presentation of Pierrot in which white predominates ("in a white surtout . . ." ". . . with head and hands as white as plaster . . ." ". . . a white kerchief . . ." ". . . hands of plaster, too . . ."): "N.B.—Pierrot seems to speak?—A pure literary fiction!—Pierrot is *mute*, and the drama is, from one end to the other, *mimed*." These words—"pure," "fiction," "mute"—will be picked up again by Mallarmé.

Within this literary fiction whose verbal writing supervenes after the occurrence [*coup*] of a different sort of writing, the latter—the gestural act of the mimodrama—is described as anamnesis. It is already the memory of a certain past. The crime has already taken place at the moment Pierrot mimes it. And he mimes—“in the present”—“*under the false appearance of a present*,” the perpetrated crime. But in miming the past in the present, he reconstitutes, in the said “present,” the deliberations through which he prepared the murder, when, examining all possible means to be used, he was still dealing with a crime to come, a death to give. Pierrot has sent the undertaker away; he stares at Columbine’s portrait and “points at it with a mysterious finger.” “I remember . . . Let’s close the curtains! I don’t dare . . . (He backs up and, without looking behind him, pulls the drapes shut. His mouth trembles and then an invincible force wrenches from him the secret that has risen to his lips. The MUSIC stops, listens.)

Here [large letters, the discourse of the mute mime]:

Columbine, my charming wife, the Columbine in the portrait, was sleeping. She slept over there, in the big bed: I killed her. Why? . . . Ah, here is why! My gold, she filched; my best wine, she drank; my back, she beat, and hard, too: as for my forehead, she decorated it. A cuckold, yes, that’s what she made me, and exorbitantly, but what does that matter? I killed her—because I felt like it, I am the master, what can anyone say? To kill her, yes . . . that pleases me. But how shall I go about it? (For Pierrot, like a sleepwalker, reproduces his crime, and in his hallucination, the *past* becomes *present*.) [a sleepwalker: all this is happening, if one can still say, between sleep and wakefulness, perception and dream; the words “*past*” and “*present*” are underlined by the author; we encounter them again, underlined differently, in *Mimique*. Thus, in the apparent present of his writing, the author of the booklet, who is none other than the Mime, describes in words the past-present of a mimodrama which itself, in its apparent present, silently mimed an event—the crime—in the past-present but of which the present has never occupied the stage, has never been perceived by anyone, nor even, as we shall see, ever really been committed. Never, anywhere, not even in the theatrical fiction. The booklet reminds us that the mime “is reproducing his crime,” miming what he remembers, and in so doing is obliged to begin by miming, in the present, the past deliberations over a crime yet to be committed] “Of course, there’s the rope—pull it tight and blam! it’s done! yes, but then the tongue hanging out, the horrible face? no—the knife? or a saber, a long saber? zap! in the heart . . . yes, but then the blood flows out in torrents, streaming.—Ugh! what a devil of a . . . Poison? a

little tiny vial, quaff it and then . . . yes! then the cramps, the runs, the pains, the tortures, ah! how awful (it would be discovered, anyway). Of course, there's the gun, bam! but bam! would be heard. —Nothing, I can think of nothing. (He paces gravely back and forth, deep in thought, By accident, he trips.) Ow! that hurts! (He strokes his foot.) Oof! that hurts! It's not serious, it's better already. (He keeps on stroking and tickling his foot.) Ha! ha! that's funny! Ha! Ha! No, it makes me laugh. Ah! (He abruptly lets go of his foot. He slaps himself on the head.) I've got it! (Slyly:) I've got it! I'm going to tickle my wife to death. There!"

Pierrot then mimes all the way to the "supreme spasm" the rising of ecstatic hilarity. The crime, the orgasm, is mimed doubly: the Mime plays the roles of both Pierrot and Columbine alternately. Here is simply the descriptive passage (in parentheses and in roman letters) in which the crime and the orgasm (what Baraille calls dying laughing and laughing [at] dying) take place such that in the final analysis what happens is nothing, no violence, no stigmata, no traces; the perfect crime in that it can be confused only with the heights of pleasure [*jouissance*] obtainable from a certain speculation. The author indeed disappears since Pierrot also is (plays) Columbine and since at the end of the scene he dies, too, before the spectacle of Columbine, who suddenly comes to life and, inside her portrait, bursts out laughing. Here, then, is the apparent production of the spasm or, let us already hazard the word, of the hymen: "And now, let's tickle: Columbine, it's you that will pay for this." (And he tickles wild, he tickles fierce, he tickles again, he tickles without mercy, then throws himself on the bed and becomes Columbine. She [he] writhes in horrible gaiety. One of the arms gets loose and frees the other arm, and these two crazed arms start fulminating against Pierrrot. She [he] bursts out in a true, strident, mortal laugh; sits bolt upright; tries to jump out of bed; and still her [his] feet are dancing, tickled, tortured, epileptic. It is the death throes. She [he] rises up once or twice—supreme spasm!—opens her [his] mouth for one last curse, and throws back, out of the bed, her [his] drooping head and arms. Pierrrot becomes Pierrot again. At the foot of the bed, he is still scratching, worn out, gasping, but victorious . . .)

After congratulating him(her)self for having, through this nonviolent crime, through this sort of masturbatory suicide, saved his (her) head from the "chopper's blow [*coup de couperet*]" of the guillotine ("I wash my hands of it, you understand"), the androgynous mime is overtaken, incoercibly, by "Columbine's tickle, like a contagious, avenging ill." He tries to escape it by what he calls a "remedy": the bottle with which another erotic scene concludes in a "spasm" and a "swoon." After the second lapse, a hallucination presents him with a Columbine who has become animate in her

portrait, bursting out in laughter. Pierrot is again overcome by trepidation and tickling, and finally he dies at the feet of his "painted victim laughing still."

With all its false bottoms, its abysses, its *trompe-l'oeil*, such an arrangement of writings could not be a simple pretextual referent for Mallarmé's *Mimique*. But despite the (structural, temporal, textual) complexity of this booklet-object, one might have been tempted to consider it a system closed upon itself, folded back over the relation, which is certainly very tangled, between, let us say, the "act" of the mimodrama (the one Mallarmé says writes itself upon a white page) and the retrospectiveness [*l'après-coup*] of the booklet. In this case, Mallarmé's textual play of reference would be checked by a definite safety-catch.

But such is not the case. A writing that refers back only to itself carries us *at the same time*, indefinitely and systematically, to some other writing. At the same time: this is what we must account for. A writing that refers only to itself and a writing that refers indefinitely to some other writing might appear noncontradictory: the reflecting screen never captures anything but writing, indefinitely, stopping nowhere, and each reference still confines us within the element of reflection. Of course. But the difficulty arises in the relation between the medium of writing and the determination of each textual unit. It is necessary that while referring each time to another text, to another determinate system, each organism only refer to *itself* as a determinate structure; a structure that is open and closed *at the same time*.

Letting itself be read for itself, doing without any external pretext, *Mimique* is also haunted by the ghost or grafted onto the arborescence of another text. Concerning which, *Mimique* explains that that text describes a gestural writing dictated by nothing and pointing only toward its own initiality, etc. Margueritte's booklet is thus, for *Mimique*, both a sort of epigraph, an hors d'œuvre, and a seed, a seminal infiltration: indeed both at once, which only the operation of the *graft* can no doubt represent. One ought to explore systematically not only what appears to be a simple etymological coincidence uniting the graft and the graph (both from *graphion*: writing implement, stylus), but also the analogy between the forms of textual grafting and so-called vegetal grafting, or even, more and more commonly today, animal grafting. It would not be enough to compose an encyclopedic catalogue of grafts (approach grafting, detached scion grafting; whip grafts, splice grafts, saddle grafts, cleft grafts, bark grafts; bridge grafting, inarching, repair grafting, bracing; T-budding, shield budding, etc.); one must elaborate a systematic treatise on the textual graft. Among other things, this would help us understand the functioning of

footnotes, for example, or epigraphs, and in what way, to the one who knows how to read, these are sometimes more important than the so-called principal or capital text. And when the capital title itself becomes a scion, one can no longer choose between the presence or absence of the title.<sup>21</sup>

We have pointed out just about all the structural elements of Margueritte's book. We know what its themes and title are. What is left? On the title page, between the author's proper name and the title on the one hand, and the name of the writer of the preface on the other hand, there is an *epigraph* and a third proper name. It is a quotation from Théophile Gautier:

The story of Pierrot who tickled his wife,  
And thus made her laughingly give up her life.

Now we know. This whole mimodrama refers back one more step, through the incision marked by the epigraph, to another text. At least one, <sup>recursive</sup> and whatever Margueritte may have said in his Note. An eye graft, a text extending far out of sight.

Out of sight—you are here slowly coming back to the hymen and dissemination—for there would be a certain imprudence in believing that one could, at last, stop at a textual seed or principle of life referring only to itself in the form of Gautier's *Pierrot Posthume*.<sup>22</sup> A notch is marked there,

21. For the reasons being set forth here, this concept of the textual graft would be hard to confine simply to the field of a "human psychology" of the imagination, as Bachelard defines it in the following beautifully written passage from *L'Eau et les Rêves* [*Water and Dreams*]: "What we love above all in man is what can be written about him. Does what can't be written deserve to be lived? We have thus been obliged to content ourselves with the *grafted* material imagination, and we have almost always confined ourselves to the study of the different branches of the materializing imagination found *above the graft* whenever any culture has put its mark on any nature.

"Moreover, this is not, for us, a simple metaphor. On the contrary, the *graft* appears to us to be a concept essential to the understanding of human psychology. It is, in our view, the human sign as such, the necessary sign for specifying human imagination. For us, humanity imagining is something that lies beyond nature naturing. It is the graft that can really give the material imagination the exuberance of forms. It is the graft that can transmit the variety and density of matter to the formal imagination. It forces the seedling to flower and gives matter to the flower. In a completely nonmetaphorical sense, the production of a poetic work requires that there be a union between a dreaming activity and an ideating activity. Art is grafted nature" (pp. 14–15; original emphasis). These statements are disputed, from a "psychocritical" point of view, by Charles Mauton (*Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel* [*From Obsessive Metaphors to Personal Myth*], pp. 26–27).

22. A Harlequinade in one act and in verse (done in collaboration with P. Siraudin), first performed on the Vaudeville stage on October 4, 1847. Margueritte was much later to write: "The perusal of a tragic tale by Commander Rivière along with two lines by Gautier, 'The story of Pierrot who tickled his wife, And thus made her laughingly give up her life,' determined my Satanic, ultraromantic and yet very modern conception: a refined, neurotic, cruel yet ingenuous Pierrot in whom all possible contrasts were alloyed, a veritable psychic

one that again opens onto another text and practices another reading. The analysis of all this would be infinite. Harlequin offers a mouse to Columbine under the pretext that "A woman's a cat holding us in her claws; / A mouse is the right gift to place in her paws." To which Columbine replies: "A jewel-box is nicer than thirty mousetraps." All this at the moment that Pierrot's death in Algiers is being announced by Harlequin ("Bah! nothing's surer: his obituary, / On the opening pages of each dictionary, / Is visibly written with paraps profuse, / Just under a Pierrot attached to a noose."). Pierrot returns, and is summoned to testify to his own death: "I can rejoice no longer in seeing myself," and he wanders about like a phantom. Mistakenly, he drinks a philter of resurrection and swallows the mouse Harlequin has surreptitiously introduced into the bottle. He begins to wiggle and laugh, "mad and wild-eyed" ("If I only could slip down a tomcat inside!"), and finally decides to kill himself. And in the course of a soliloquy, as he deliberates over the various ways of putting an end to his life, *he remembers something he has read*: "Let's go commit suicide once and for all. / Hm, what about rope? No, that's no solution: / Hemp doesn't go with my soul's constitution . . . / Jump off a bridge? cold water's too chilling . . . / Smother myself in a bed with down filling? / Fi! I'm too white to be aping Othello . . . / Not feathers, nor water, nor rope for this fellow . . . / I have it: I've read in an old-fashioned story / The tale of a husband who tickled his wife, / And thus made her laughingly give up her life . . . He tickles himself. Ha! ha! I shall soon leap about like a calf / If I don't . . . Let's go on . . . How this does make me laugh! / I'm bursting! and now to move down to the feet. / I'm fainting, I'm crawling, I'm in a fire's heat! / How the universe opens before my dazed eyes! / Ho! ho! I am fainting and cannot arise." *Columbine*: "Who's this idiot pinching himself just for fun?" *Pierrot*: "A ghost who is dying." *Columbine*: "Say that again?"

After a number of other episodes (scenes of poisoning, Pierrot as a vampire figure, etc.), Pierrot turns to address the audience. This time we do not have a Mime-librettist attributing fictional status to a booklet of words

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Proteus, a bit sadistic, quite willingly a lush, and a perfect scoundrel. Thus it is that with *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife*—a tragic nightmare à la Hoffmann or Edgar Allan Poe, in which Pierrot makes his wife die laughing by tickling the bottoms of her feet—I was a precursor in the revival of pantomime back in 1881; I might even say *the* precursor." (*Nos Tréteaux* [*Our Stage*], 1910). Margueritte seems not to be familiar with all the back corridors and genealogies of this scene. For example, death by foot tickling occurs in *Les roueries de Trialph*, *Notre contemporain avant son suicide* [*Trialph's Tricks: Our Contemporary prior to his Suicide*] by Lassailly (1833); tickling to death is already found in *The White Devil* by Webster (1612): "He tickles you to death, makes you die laughing" (V, iii), the whole time, of course, in the interval and already, so to speak, in the English language.



being substituted for a mute mimic. We have a Pierrot who, while speaking upon the stage, begs forgiveness for having done so, the entire thing being enclosed within the writing of a booklet: "Pardon Pierrot for speaking, please. Most of the time / I play my part only through grimace and mime. / I silently move like a phantom in white, / Always fooled, always beaten, and trembling with fright, / Through all the imbroglios traced out in bold / Brush-strokes by the Comedy dreamed up of old. / *Comedia dell' arte* was once this art's name, / Where actors embroidered their role as it came."

One could go on at great length in order to find out where this Pierrot had read the exemplary story of this husband who tickled his wife and thus made her laughingly give up her life. With all the threads provided by the *comedia dell' arte*, one would find oneself caught in an interminable network.<sup>23</sup> Bibliographical research, source studies, the archeology of all Pierrots would be at once endless and useless, at least as far as what interests us here is concerned, since the process of cross-referencing and grafting is *remarked inside* Mallarmé's text, which thereby has no more "inside" than it can properly be said to be *by* Mallarmé.

The moment at which we appeared to take leave of that text was marked by the proposition I shall here recall: setting down and composing by himself his soliloquy, tracing it upon the white page he himself is, the Mime does not allow his text to be dictated to him from any other place. He represents nothing, imitates nothing, does not have to conform to any prior referent with the aim of achieving adequation or verisimilitude. One can here foresee an objection: since the mime imitates nothing, reproduces nothing, opens up in its origin the very thing he is tracing out, presenting, or producing, he must be the very movement of truth. Not, of course, truth

23. Among other intersections, one would encounter a *Pierrot Dead and Alive*, a *Pierrot Valet of Death* (with a review by Nerval, who had combed all of Europe in order to study pantomime), a *Pierrot Hanged* (by Champfleury) in punishment for the theft of a book, a Pierrot disguised as a mattress on which his Colombine more or less makes love with Harlequin, after which they make a hole in the mattress cover and card the wool, which prompts Théophile Gautier to write: "A moment later some woolcarders appear and subject Pierrtot to a painful quarter-hour [*quart d'heure~cardeur* (carder)]; to be carded, what a fate! it's enough to take your breath [*l'haleine~la laine* (wool)] away. Please excuse these puns, which cannot occur in pantomime, which proves the superiority of those sorts of works over all others." Elsewhere, Gautier notes that "the origin of Pierrot," "the symbol of the proletarian," is just as "interesting" as those enigmas "that have aroused the curiosity of the . . . Father Kirchers, the Champollions, etc." This is a lead to follow. I would like to thank Paule Thévenin for helping me in this library of Pierrots, who are all, including Margueritte's, at once living and dead, living more dead than alive, *between* life and death, taking into consideration those effects of specular doubling which the abundant literature of the time associates with Hoffman, Nerval, and even Poe.

in the form of adequation between the representation and the present of the thing itself, or between the imitator and the imitated, but truth as the present unveiling of the present: monstration, manifestation, production, *alētheia*. The mime produces, that is to say makes appear *in praesentia*, manifests the very meaning of what he is presently writing: of what he *performs*. He enables the thing to be perceived in person, in its true face. If one followed the thread of this objection, one would go back, beyond imitation, toward a more "originary" sense of *alētheia* and of *mimēsthai*. One would thus come up with one of the most typical and tempting metaphysical reappropriations of writing, one that can always crop up in the most divergent contexts.

One could indeed push Mallarmé back into the most "originary" metaphysics of truth if all mimicry [*mimique*] had indeed disappeared, if it had effaced itself in the scriptural production of truth.

But such is not the case. *There is* mimicry. Mallarmé sets great store by it, along with simulacrum (and along with pantomime, theater, and dance; all these motifs intersect in particular in *Richard Wagner, Rêverie d'un Poète français*, which we are holding and commenting upon here behind the scenes). We are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference. It is in this that the mime's operation does allude, but alludes to nothing, alludes without breaking the mirror, without reaching beyond the looking-glass. "*That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror.*" This speculum reflects no reality; it produces mere "reality-effects." For this double that often makes one think of Hoffmann (mentioned by Beissier in his Preface), reality, indeed, is death. It will prove to be inaccessible, otherwise than by simulacrum, just like the dreamed-of *simplicity* of the supreme spasm or of the hymen. In this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a difference or dyad does exist, since there are mimes and phantoms. But it is a difference without reference, or rather a reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a ghost that is the phantom of no flesh, wandering about without a past, without any death, birth, or presence.

Mallarmé thus preserves the differential structure of mimicry or *mimēsis*, but without its Platonic or metaphysical interpretation, which implies that somewhere the being of something that *is*, is being imitated. Mallarmé even maintains (and maintains himself in) the structure of the *phantasma* as it is defined by Plato: the simulacrum as the copy of a copy. With the exception that there is no longer any model, and hence, no copy, and that

this structure (which encompasses Plato's text, including his attempt to escape it) is no longer being referred back to any ontology or even to any dialectic. Any attempt to reverse mimetologism or escape it in one fell swoop by leaping out of it *with both feet* would only amount to an inevitable and immediate fall back into its system: in suppressing the double or making it dialectical, one is back in the perception of the thing itself, the production of its presence, its truth, as idea, form, or matter. In comparison with Platonic or Hegelian idealism, the displacement we are here for the sake of convenience calling "Mallarméan" is more subtle and patient, more discreet and efficient. It is a simulacrum of Platonism or Hegelianism, which is separated from what it simulates only by a barely perceptible veil, about which one can just as well say that it already runs—unnoticed—between Platonism and itself, between Hegelianism and itself. Between Mallarmé's text and itself. It is thus not simply false to say that Mallarmé is a Platonist or a Hegelian. But it is above all not true.<sup>24</sup>

And vice versa.

What interests us here is less these propositions of a philosophical type than the mode of their reinscription in the text of *Mimique*. What is marked there is the fact that, this imitator having in the last instance no imitated, this signifier having in the last instance no signified, this sign having in the last instance no referent, their operation is no longer comprehended within the process of truth but on the contrary comprehends *it*, the motif of the last

24. Just as the motif of neutrality, in its negative form, paves the way for the most classical and suspect attempts at reappropriation, it would be imprudent just to cancel out the pairs of metaphysical oppositions, simply to *mark off* from them any text (assuming this to be possible). The strategic analysis must be constantly readjusted. For example, the deconstruction of the pairs of metaphysical oppositions could end up defusing and neutralizing Mallarmé's text and would thus serve the interests invested in its prevailing traditional interpretation, which up to now has been massively idealist. It is in and against this context that one can and should emphasize the "materialism of the idea." We have borrowed this definition from Jean Hyppolite ("... within this materialism of the idea he imagines the diverse possibilities for reading the text . . ." "Le coup de dés de Stéphane Mallarmé et le message," in *les Etudes philosophiques*, 1958, no. 4). This is an example of that *strategic dissymmetry* that must ceaselessly counterbalance the neutralizing moments of any deconstruction. This dissymmetry has to be minutely calculated, taking into account all the analyzable differences within the topography of the field in which it operates. It will in any case be noted that the "logic of the hymen" we are deciphering here is not a logic of negative neutrality, nor even of neutrality at all. Let us also stress that this "materialism of the idea" does not designate the content of some projected "philosophical" doctrine proposed by Mallarmé (we are indeed in the process of determining in what way there *is* no "philosophy" in his text, or rather that that text is calculated in such a way as no longer to be situated *in* philosophy), but precisely the form of what is at stake in the operation of writing and "Reading—That practice—," in the inscription of the "diverse possibilities for reading the text."

instance being inseparable from metaphysics as the search for the *arkhē*, the *eskhaton*, and the *telos*.<sup>25</sup>

If all this leaves its mark upon *Mimique*, it is not only in the chiseled precision of the writing, its extraordinary formal or syntactical felicity; it is also in what seems to be described as the thematic content or mimed event, and which in the final analysis, despite its effect of content, is nothing other than the space of writing: in this "event"—hymen, crime, suicide, spasm (of laughter or pleasure)—in which nothing happens, in which the simulacrum is a transgression and the transgression a simulacrum, everything describes the very structure of the text and effectuates its possibility. That, at least, is what we now must demonstrate.

The operation, which no longer belongs to the system of truth, does not manifest, produce, or unveil any presence; nor does it constitute any conformity, resemblance, or adequation between a presence and a representation. And yet this operation is not a unified entity but the manifold play of a scene that, illustrating nothing—neither word nor deed—beyond itself, illustrates nothing. Nothing but the many-faceted multiplicity of a lustre which itself is nothing beyond its own fragmented light. Nothing but the idea which is nothing. The ideality of the idea is here for Mallarmé the still metaphysical name that is still necessary in order to mark non-being, the nonreal, the nonpresent. This mark points, alludes without breaking the glass, to the beyond of beingness, toward the *epekeina tēs ousias*: a hymen (a closeness and a veil) between Plato's sun and Mallarmé's lustre. This "materialism of the idea" is nothing other than the staging, the theater, the visibility of nothing or of the self. It is a dramatization which *illustrates nothing*, which illustrates *the nothing*, lights up a space, re-marks a spacing as a nothing, a blank: white as a yet unwritten page, blank as a difference between two lines. "I am for—no illustration. . . ." <sup>26</sup>

25. For the reasons indicated in the preceding note, the simple erasing of the metaphysical concept of last instance would run the risk of defusing the necessary critique it permits in certain determinate contexts. To take this double inscription of concepts into account is to practice a *double science*, a bifid, *dissymmetrical* writing. Whose "general economy," defined elsewhere, does indeed constitute, in a displaced sense of the words, the last instance.

26. The context of this quotation should here be restituted and related back to what was said, at the start of this session, concerning the book, the extra-text [*hors-livre*], the image, and the illustration; then it should be related forward to what will be set in motion, in the following session, between the book and the movement of the stage. Mallarmé is responding to a survey: "I am for—no illustration; everything a book evokes should happen in the reader's mind: but, if you replace photography, why not go straight to cinematography, whose successive unrolling will replace, in both pictures and text, many a volume, advantageously" (p. 878).

This chain of terms, Theater-Idea-Mime-Drama, can be found sketched out in one of the fragments from the unpublished plans for the *Book*:

*"The summary of the theater  
as Idea and hymn                      ✦  
whence theater = Idea"*

And, a bit further on, off to one side:

<i>"Theater</i>	<i>Idea</i>
	<i>Drama</i>
<i>Hero</i>	<i>Hymn</i>
<i>mime</i>	<i>dance"</i>

The stage [*scène*] thus illustrates but the stage, the scene only the scene; there is only the equivalence between *theater* and *idea*, that is (as these two names indicate), the visibility (which remains outside) of the visible that is being effectuated. The scene illustrates, in the text of a hymen—which is more than an anagram of "hymn" [*hymne*]—"in a hymen (out of which flows *Dream*), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present."

"Hymen" (a word, indeed the only word, that reminds us that what is in question is a "supreme spasm") is first of all a sign of fusion, the consummation of a marriage, the identification of two beings, the confusion between two. *Between* the two, there is no longer difference but identity. Within this fusion, there is no longer any distance between desire (the awaiting of a full presence designed to fulfill it, to carry it out) and the fulfillment of presence, between distance and non-distance; there is no longer any difference between desire and satisfaction. It is not only the difference (between desire and fulfillment) that is abolished, but also the difference between difference and nondifference. Nonpresence, the gaping void of desire, and presence, the fullness of enjoyment, amount to the same. By the same token [*du même coup*], there is no longer any textual difference between the image and the thing, the empty signifier and the full signified, the imitator and the imitated, etc. But it does not follow, by virtue of this hymen of confusion, that there is now only one term, a single one of the differends. It does not follow that what remains is thus the fullness of the signified, the imitated, or the thing itself, simply present in person. It is the difference between the two terms that is no longer functional. The confusion or consummation of this hymen eliminates the spatial heterogeneity of the two poles in the "supreme spasm," the moment of dying laughing. By the

same token, it eliminates the exteriority or anteriority, the independence, of the imitated, the signified, or the thing. Fulfillment is summed up within desire; desire is (ahead of) fulfillment, which, still mimed, remains desire, "*without breaking the mirror.*"

What is lifted, then, is not difference but the different, the differends, the decidable exteriority of differing terms. Thanks to the confusion and continuity of the hymen, and not in spite of it, a (pure and impure) difference inscribes itself without any decidable poles, without any independent, irreversible terms. Such difference without presence appears, or rather baffles the process of appearing, by dislocating any orderly time at the center of the present. The present is no longer a mother-form around which are gathered and differentiated the future (present) and the past (present). What is marked in this hymen between the future (desire) and the present (fulfillment), between the past (remembrance) and the present (perpetration), between the capacity and the act, etc., is only a series of temporal differences without any central present, without a present of which the past and future would be but modifications. Can we then go on speaking about *time*, *tenses*, and *temporal* differences?

The center of presence is supposed to offer itself to what is called perception or, generally, intuition. In *Mimique*, however, there is no perception, no reality offering itself up, in the present, to be perceived. The plays of facial expression and the gestural tracings are not present in themselves since they always refer, perpetually allude or represent. But they don't represent anything that has ever been or can ever become present: nothing that comes before or after the mimodrama, and, within the mimodrama, an orgasm-crime that has never been committed and yet nevertheless turns into a suicide without striking or suffering a blow, etc. The signifying allusion does not go through the looking-glass: "*a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror,*" the cold, transparent, reflective window ("without breaking the ice or the mirror" is added in the third version of the text), without piercing the veil or the canvas, without tearing the moire. The antre of Mallarmé, the theater of his glossary: it lies in this suspension, the "*center of vibratory suspense,*" the repercussions of words between the walls of the grotto, or of the glottis, sounded among others by the rhymes "*hoir*" [heir], "*soir*" [evening], "*noire*" [black], "*miroir*" [mirror], "*grimoire*" [wizard's black book], "*ivoire*" [ivory], "*armoire*" [wardrobe], etc. (see figures II and IV).

What does the hymen that illustrates the suspension of differends remain, other than Dream? The capital letter marks what is new in a

concept no longer enclosed in the old opposition: Dream, being at once perception, remembrance, and anticipation (desire), each within the others, is really none of these. It declares the "fiction," the "medium, the pure medium, of fiction" (the commas in "*milieu, pur, de fiction*" also appear in the third version), a presence both perceived and not perceived, at once image and model, and hence image without model, neither image nor model, a medium (medium in the sense of middle, neither/nor, what is between extremes, and medium in the sense of element, ether, matrix, means). When we have rounded a certain corner in our reading, we will place ourselves on that side of the lustre where the "medium" is shining. The referent is lifted, but reference remains: what is left is only the writing of dreams, a fiction that is not imaginary, mimicry without imitation, without verisimilitude, without truth or falsity, a miming of appearance without concealed reality, without any world behind it, and hence without appearance: "*false appearance . . .*" There remain only traces, announcements and souvenirs, foreplays and aftereffects [*avant-coups et après-coups*] which no present will have preceded or followed and which cannot be arranged on a line around a point, traces "here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present.*" It is Mallarmé who underlines (as of the second version, in *Pages*) and thus marks the ricochet of the moment of mimed deliberation from Margueritte's *Pierrot*: at that point—in the past—where the question is raised of what to do in the future ("But how shall I go about it?"), the author of the booklet speaks to *you* in parentheses, in the "present": ("For Pierrot, like a sleepwalker, reproduces his crime, and in his hallucination, the *past* becomes *present.*") (Underlined by the author.) The historial ambiguity of the word *appearance* (at once the appearing or apparition of the being-present *and* the masking of the being-present behind its appearance) impresses its indefinite fold on this sequence, which is neither synthetic nor redundant: "*under the false appearance of a present.*" What is to be re-marked in the underlining of this circumstantial complement is the displacement without reversal of Platonism and its heritage. This displacement is always an effect of language or writing, of syntax, and never simply the dialectical overturning of a concept (signified). The very motif of dialectics, which marks the beginning and end of philosophy, however that motif might be determined and despite the resources it entertains within philosophy against philosophy, is doubtless what Mallarmé has marked with his syntax at the point of its sterility, or rather, at the point that will soon, provisionally, analogically, be called the undecidable.

Or *hymen*.

The virginity of the "yet unwritten page" opens up that space. There are still a few words that have not been illustrated: the opposition *vicious/sacred* ("hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred"; the parentheses intervene in the second version to make it clear that the adjectives modify "hymen"), the opposition *desire/perpetration*, and most importantly the syncategorem "between" (*entre*).

To repeat: the hymen, the confusion between the present and the nonpresent, along with all the indifferences it entails within the whole series of opposites (perception/nonperception, memory/image, memory/desire, etc.), produces the effect of a medium (a medium as element enveloping both terms at once; a medium located between the two terms). It is an operation that *both* sows confusion *between* opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites "at once." What counts here is the *between*, the in-between-ness of the hymen. The hymen "takes place" in the "inter-," in the spacing between desire and fulfillment, between perpetration and its recollection. But this medium of the *entre* has nothing to do with a center.

The hymen enters into the *antre*. *Entre* can just as easily be written with an *a* (see figures II and IV). Indeed, are these two (*e*)(*a*)ntres not really the same? Littré: "ANTRE, s.m. 1. Cave, natural grotto, deep dark cavern. 'These antres, these braziers that offer us oracles,' Voltaire, *Oedipe* II, 5. 2. Fig. The antres of the police, of the Inquisition. 3. *Anatomy*: name given to certain bone cavities. —Syn: *Antre*, cave, grotto. Cave, an empty, hollow, concave space in the form of a vault, is the generic term; *antre* is a deep, dark, black cave; *grotto* is a picturesque cave created by nature or by man. Etym. Antrum, 'άντρον; Sanscrit, *antara*, cleft, cave. *Antara* properly signifies 'interval' and is thus related to the Latin preposition *inter* (see *entre*). Provenc. *antre*; Span. and Ital. *antro*." And the entry for ENTRER ["to enter"] ends with the same etymological reference. The *interval* of the *entre*, the in-between of the hymen: one might be tempted to visualize these as the hollow or bed of a valley (*vallis*) without which there would be no mountains, like the sacred vale between the two flanks of the Parnassus, the dwelling-place of the Muses and the site of Poetry; but *intervallum* is composed of *inter* (between) and *vallus* (pole), which gives us not the pole in between, but the space between two palisades. According to Littré.

We are thus moving from the logic of the palisade, which is always, in a sense, "full," to the logic of the hymen. The hymen, the consummation of differends, the continuity and confusion of the coitus, merges with what it seems to be derived from: the hymen as protective screen, the jewel box of virginity, the vaginal partition, the fine, invisible veil which, in front of the



hystera, stands *between* the inside and the outside of a woman, and consequently between desire and fulfillment. It is neither desire nor pleasure but in between the two. Neither future nor present, but between the two. It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting, in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder. If either one *did* take place, there would be no hymen. But neither would there simply be a hymen in (case events go) *no* place. With all the undecidability of its meaning, the hymen only takes place when it doesn't take place, when nothing *really* happens, when there is an all-consuming consummation without violence, or a violence without blows, or a blow without marks, a mark without a mark (a margin), etc., when the veil is, *without being*, torn, for example when one is made to die or come laughing.

Ὑμήν designates a fine, filmy membrane enveloping certain bodily organs; for example, says Aristotle, the heart or the intestines. It is also the cartilage in certain fish, the wings of certain insects (bees, wasps, and ants, which are called hymenoptera), the foot membranes in certain birds (the hymenopoda), a white pellicle over the eyes of certain birds, the sheath encasing the seed or bean of plants. A tissue on which so many bodily metaphors are written.

There exist treatises on membranes or *hymenologies*; descriptions of membranes or *hymenographies*. Rightly or wrongly, the etymology of "hymen" is often traced to a root *u* that can be found in the Latin *suo*, *suere* (to sew) and in *huphos* (tissue). *Hymen* might then mean a little stitch (*syuman*) (*syuntah*, sewn, *siula*, needle; *schuh*, sew; *suo*). The same hypothesis, while sometimes contested, is put forth for *hymn*, which would thus not be a merely accidental anagram of *hymen* [*hymnelhymen*] (see figure V). Both words would have a relation with *uphainō* (to weave, spin—the spider web—machinate), with *huphos* (textile, spider web, net, the text of a work—Longinus), and with *humnos* (a weave, later the weave of a song, by extension a wedding song or song of mourning). Littré: . . . "according to Curtius, ὕμνος has the same root as ὑφάω, to weave, ὑφή, ὕφος, textile; in that long ago era when writing was unknown, most of the words used to designate a poetic composition were borrowed from the art of the weaver, the builder, etc."

The hymen is thus a sort of textile. Its threads should be interwoven with all the veils, gauzes, canvases, fabrics, moires, wings, feathers, all the curtains and fans that hold within their folds all—almost—of the Mallarméan corpus. We could spend a night doing that. The text of *Mimique* is not the only place where the word "hymen" occurs. It appears, with the same syntactical resources of undecidability, handled more or less systematically,

in the *Cantate pour la Première Communion* [*Cantata for the First Communion*] composed by Mallarmé at the age of sixteen ("in this mysterious hymen / Between strength and weakness"), in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* [*The Afternoon of a Faun*] ("Too much hymen hoped for by him who seeks the *la*"), in the *Offrandes à divers du Faune* [*Gifts of the Faun to a Few*] ("The Faun would dream of hymen and of a chaste ring"), and especially in *Richard Wagner, Rêverie d'un Poète français*, where all the elements of the constellation are named over two pages (pp. 543–45): the Mime, the hymen, the virgin, the occult, the penetration and the envelope, the theater, the hymn, the "folds of a tissue," the touch that transforms nothing, the "song, spurting out of a rift," the "fusion of these disparate forms of pleasure."

A folding back, once more: the hymen, "*a medium, a pure medium, of fiction*," is located between present acts that don't take place. What takes place is only the *entre*, the place, the spacing, which is nothing, the ideality (as nothingness) of the idea. No act, then, is *perpetrated* ("*Hymen . . . between perpetration and remembrance*"); no act is committed as a crime. There is only the memory of a crime that has never been committed, not only because on the stage we have never seen it in the present (the Mime is recalling it), but also because no violence has been exerted (someone has been made to die of laughter, and then the "criminal"—bursting with hilarity—is absolved by his own death), and because this crime is its opposite: an act of love. Which itself has not taken place. To perpetrate, as its calculated consonance with "penetrate" suggests, is to pierce, but fictively, the hymen, the threshold never crossed. Even when he takes that step, Pierrot remains, before the doors, the "solitary captive of the threshold" (*Pour votre chère morte* [*For your dear departed*]).

To pierce the hymen or to pierce one's eyelid (which in some birds is called a hymen), to lose one's sight or one's life, no longer to see the light of day, is the fate of all Pierrots. Gautier's *Pierrot Posthume* succumbs to it, prior to Margueritte's. It is the fate of the simulacrum. He applies the procedure to himself and pretends to die, after swallowing the mouse, then by tickling himself, in the supreme spasm of infinite masturbation. This Pierrot's hymen was perhaps not quite so subtly transparent, so invisibly lacking in consistency, as Mallarmé's. But it is also because his hymen (marriage) remains precarious and uncertain that he kills himself or passes himself off as dead. Thinking that, if he is already dead in others' eyes, he would be incapable of rising to the necessary hymen, the *true* hymen, between Columbine and himself, this posthumous Pierrot simulates suicide: "I'll beat up on Harlequin, take back my wife... / But how? and with what? my soul's all my life, / I'm a being of reason, I'm all immaterial.

/ A hymen needs palpable things, not ethereal... / What a puzzle! to settle these doubts, let's not stall: / Let's go commit suicide once and for all."<sup>27</sup> But suicide being still another species of the genus "hymen," he will never have finished killing himself, the "once and for all" expressing precisely that which the hymen always makes a mockery of, that before which we shall always burst out laughing.

*Quant au Livre [As for the Book]* : The structures of the hymen, suicide, and time are closely linked together. "Suicide or abstention, to do nothing, why? Only time in the world, for, due to an event that I shall explain, always, there is no Present, no—a present does not exist . . . . For lack of the Crowd's declaration, for lack—of all. Ill-informed is he who would pronounce himself his own contemporary, deserting, usurping, with equal imprudence, when some past has ceased and a future is slow in coming or else both are perplexedly mixed with a view to masking the gap" (p. 372).

A masked gap, impalpable and insubstantial, interposed, slipped between, the *entre* of the hymen is reflected in the screen without penetrating it. The hymen remains in the hymen. The one—the veil of virginity where nothing has yet taken place—remains in the other—consummation, release, and penetration of the *antre*.

And vice versa.

The mirror is never passed through and the ice never broken. At the edge of being.

At the edge of being, the medium of the hymen never becomes a mere mediation or work of the negative; it outwits and undoes all ontologies, all philosophemes, all manner of dialectics. It outwits them and—as a cloth, a tissue, a medium again—it envelops them, turns them over, and inscribes them. This nonpenetration, this nonperpetration (which is not simply negative but stands between the two), this suspense in the *antre* of penetration, is, says Mallarmé, "*perpetual*": "*This is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction.*" (The play of the commas

27. The word "Hymen," sometimes allegorized by a capital H, is of course part of the vocabulary of "Pierrots" ("Harlequin and Polichinelle both aspire to a glorious hymen with Colombine," Gautier), just as it is included in the "symbolist" code. It nevertheless remains—and is significant—that Mallarmé with his syntactic play remarks the undecidable ambivalence. The "event" (the historical event, if you wish) has the form of a repetition, the mark—readable because doubled—of a quasi-tearing, a *dehiscence*. "DEHISCENCE: s.f. Botanical term. The action through which the distinct parts of a closed organ open up, without tearing, along a seam. A regular predetermined splitting that, at a certain moment in the cycle, is undergone by the closed organs so that what they contain can come out . . . E. Lat. *Dehiscere*, to open slightly, from *de* and *hiscere*, the frequentative of *hiare* (see *hiatus*)."  
Littré.

(*virgulae*) only appears, in all its multiplicity, in the last version, inserting a series of cuts marking pauses and cadence, spacing and shortness of breath, within the continuum of the sequence).<sup>28</sup> Hymen in perpetual motion: one can't get out of Mallarmé's antre as one can out of Plato's cave. Never min(e)d [*mine de rien*];<sup>29</sup> it requires an entirely different kind of speleology which no longer searches behind the lustrous appearance, outside the "beyond," "agent," "motor," "principal part or nothing" of the "literary mechanism" (*Music and Letters*, p. 647).

"... as much as it takes to illustrate one of the aspects and this lode of language" (p. 406).

"*That is how the Mime operates*": every time Mallarmé uses the word "operation," nothing happens that could be grasped as a present event, a reality, an activity, etc. The Mime doesn't *do* anything; there is no act (neither murderous nor sexual), no acting agent and hence no patient. Nothing *is*. The word *is* does not appear in *Mimique*, which is nevertheless conjugated in the *present*, within and upon the "*false appearance of a present*," with one exception, and even then in a form that is not that of a declaration of existence and barely that of a predicative copula ("*It is up to the poet, roused by a dare, to translate!*"). Indeed, the constant ellipsis of the verb "to be" by Mallarmé has already been noted.<sup>30</sup> This ellipsis is complementary to the frequency of the word *jeu* [play, game, act]; the practice of "play" in Mallarmé's writing is in collusion with the casting aside of "being." The *casting aside* [*mise à l'écart*] of being defines itself and literally (im)prints itself in dissemination, *as* dissemination.

The play of the hymen is *at once* vicious and sacred, "tainted with vice yet sacred." And so, too, is it neither the one nor the other since nothing happens and the hymen remains suspended *entre*, outside and inside the antre. Nothing is more vicious than this suspense, this distance played at; nothing is more perverse than this rending penetration that leaves a virgin womb intact. But nothing is more marked by the sacred, like so many Mallarméan veils, more folded, intangible, sealed, untouched. Here we ought to grasp fully the analogy between *Mimique*'s "scenario" and the one that is spottily sketched out in the fragments of the Book. Among them, these:

28. "... I prefer, as being more to my taste, upon a white page, a carefully spaced pattern of commas and periods and their secondary combinations, imitating, naked, the melody—over the text, advantageously suggested if, even though sublime, it were not punctuated" (p. 407).

29. TN. In French, *mine de rien* means, in its colloquial sense, "as though it were of no importance," but literally it can mean "a mine full of nothing."

30. Cf. Jacques Scherer, *l'Expression littéraire dans l'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, pp. 142 ff.

19 A

On the other side, both future  
and past

(one arm, another,  
raised, posture of  
a dancer

Such is what takes place  
visible  
with him omitted

20 A

to open onto<sup>1</sup> medium (solitary  
within the self—<sup>2</sup> this extends  
to the mysterious fore-stage, like the  
ground—preparation for the festival  
= intermission\*

confusion of the two

with interruption of the open ground

or = \*\*  
the action in  
the background  
—taking up where  
one leaves off

= \* intermission  
before alone  
and growing  
with the medium

(recall the festival (regrets, etc.)

and the curtain rises—falls

the "house"  
and backdrop  
the beyond

corresponds to ground

and mysterious fore-stage—corresponds to  
what hides the background (canvas, etc.) makes its  
mystery—

---

background = the "house"

\*\*

with lustres

1. onto a second ground
2. solitary festival in the self—festival

21 A

the electrical arabesque  
lights up behind—and the two  
veils

—a sort of sacred rending of the  
veil, written there—or rends—

and two beings at once bird  
and scent—like the two in a  
pulpit  
high (balcony) com

---

the egg

church

22 A

.....  
.....

There, that is all the echo says—  
double, lying, questioned  
by the wandering spirit (of the wind)

24 A

.....  
.....

—During that time—the curtain  
of the diorama deepened—shadow  
more and more pronounced, as though hollowed  
out by it—by the mystery—

The blinds have rendered themselves null . . . .  
.....

169 A [in the corner of a page]

Operation\*  
crime oath?  
\*which is neither. nor.  
.....

50 B

5 years. the lustre

The Mime is *acting* from the moment he is ruled by no actual action and aims toward no form of verisimilitude. The act always plays out a difference without reference, or rather without a referent, without any absolute exteriority, and hence, without any inside. The Mime mimes reference. He is not an imitator; he mimes imitation. The hymen interposes itself between mimicry and *mimēsis* or rather between *mimēsis* and *mimēsis*. A copy of a copy, a simulacrum that simulates the Platonic simulacrum—the Platonic copy of a copy as well as the Hegelian curtain<sup>31</sup> have lost here the lure of the present referent and thus find themselves lost for dialectics and ontology, lost for absolute knowledge. Which is also, as Bataille would literally have it, “mimed.” In this perpetual allusion being performed in the background of the *entre* that has no ground, one can never know what the allusion alludes to, unless it is to itself in the process of alluding, weaving its hymen and manufacturing its text. Wherein allusion becomes a game conforming only to its own formal rules. As its name indicates, allusion *plays*. But that this play should in the last instance be independent of truth does not mean that it is false, an error, appearance, or illusion. Mallarmé writes “allusion,” not “illusion.” Allusion, or “suggestion” as Mallarmé says elsewhere, is indeed that operation we are here *by analogy* calling undecidable. An undecidable proposition, as Gödel demonstrated in 1931, is a proposition which, given a system of axioms governing a multiplicity, is neither an analytical nor deductive consequence of those axioms, nor in contradiction with them, neither true nor false with respect to those axioms. *Tertium datur*, without synthesis.

31. As for the hymen between Hegel and Mallarmé, one can analyze, for example, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a certain curtain-raising observed from the singular standpoint of the *we*, the philosophic consciousness, the subject of absolute knowing: “The two extremes . . . , the one, of the pure inner world, the other, that of the inner being gazing into this pure inner world, have now coincided, and just as they, *qua* extremes, have vanished, so too the middle term, as something other than these extremes, has also vanished. This curtain [Vorhang] hanging before the inner world is therefore drawn away, and we have the inner being . . . gazing into the inner world—the vision of the undifferentiated selfsame being, which repels itself from itself, posits itself as an inner being containing different moments, but for which equally these moments are immediately *not* different—*self-consciousness*. It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen. But at the same time it is evident that we cannot without more ado go straightway behind appearance” [trans. Miller, p. 103]. I would like to thank A. Bourtuche for recalling this text to my attention.

"Undecidability" is not caused here by some enigmatic equivocality, some inexhaustible ambivalence of a word in a "natural" language, and still less by some "*Gegensinn der Urworte*" (Abel).<sup>32</sup> In dealing here with *hymen*, it is not a matter of repeating what Hegel undertook to do with German words like *Aufhebung*, *Urteil*, *Meinen*, *Beispiel*, etc., marveling over that lucky accident that installs a natural language within the element of speculative dialectics. What counts here is not the lexical richness, the semantic infiniteness of a word or concept, its depth or breadth, the sedimentation that has produced inside it two contradictory layers of signification (continuity and discontinuity, inside and outside, identity and difference, etc.). What counts here is the formal or syntactical *praxis* that composes and decomposes it. We have indeed been making believe that everything could be traced to the word *hymen*. But the irreplaceable character of this signifier, which everything seemed to grant it, was laid out like a trap. This word, this syllepsis,<sup>33</sup> is not indispensable; philology and etymology interest us only secondarily, and the loss of the "hymen" would not be irreparable for *Mimique*. It produces its effect first and foremost through the syntax, which disposes the "*entre*" in such a way that the suspense is due only to the placement and not to the content of words. Through the "hymen" one can remark only what the place of the word *entre* already marks and would mark even if the word "hymen" were not there. If we replaced "hymen" by "marriage" or "crime," "identity" or "difference," etc., the effect would be the same, the only loss being a certain economic condensation or accumulation, which has not gone unnoticed. It is the "between," whether it names fusion or separation, that thus carries all the force of the operation. The hymen must be determined through the *entre* and not the other way around. The hymen in the text (crime, sexual act,

32. We are referring less to the text in which Freud is directly inspired by Abel (1910) than to *Das Unheimliche* (1919), of which we are here, in sum, proposing a rereading. We find ourselves constantly being brought back to that text by the paradoxes of the double and of repetition, the blurring of the boundary lines between "imagination" and "reality," between the "symbol" and the "thing it symbolizes" ("The Uncanny," trans. Alix Stracbey, in *On Creativity and the Unconscious* [New York: Harper & Row, 1958], p. 152), the references to Hoffman and the literature of the fantastic, the considerations on the double meaning of words: "Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*" (p. 131) (to be continued).

33. "The mixed tropes called *Syllepses* consist of taking one and the same word in two different senses, one of which is, or is supposed to be, the original, or at least the *literal*, meaning; the other, the *figurative*, or supposedly figurative, even if it is not so in reality. This can be done by *metonymy*, *synecdoche*, or *metaphor*" (P. Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, introduction by G. Genette, Flammarion, p. 105.) [This figure is more commonly called a *zeugma* in English.—Trans.]



incest, suicide, simulacrum) is inscribed at the very tip of this indecision. This tip advances according to the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic. The word "between" has no full meaning of its own. *Inter* acting forms a syntactical plug; not a categorem, but a syncategorem: what philosophers from the Middle Ages to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* have called an incomplete signification. What holds for "hymen" also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for all other signs which, like *pharmakon*, *supplément*, *différance*, and others, have a double, contradictory, undecidable value that always derives from their syntax, whether the latter is in a sense "internal," articulating and combining under the same yoke, *hup'h' hen*, two incompatible meanings, or "external," dependent on the code in which the word is made to function. But the syntactical composition and decomposition of a sign renders this alternative between internal and external inoperative. One is simply dealing with greater or lesser syntactical units at work, and with economic differences in condensation. Without reducing all these to the same, quite the contrary, it is possible to recognize a certain serial law in these points of indefinite pivoting: they mark the spots of what can never be mediated, mastered, sublated, or dialecticized through any *Erinnerung* or *Aufhebung*. Is it by chance that all these play effects, these "words" that escape philosophical mastery, should have, in widely differing historical contexts, a very singular relation to writing? These "words" admit into their games both contradiction and noncontradiction (and the contradiction and noncontradiction *between* contradiction and noncontradiction). Without any dialectical *Aufhebung*, without any time off, they belong in a sense both to consciousness and to the unconscious, which Freud tells us can tolerate or remain insensitive to contradiction. Insofar as the text depends upon them, *bends* to them [*s'y plie*], it thus plays a *double scene* upon a double stage. It operates in two absolutely different places at once, even if these are only separated by a veil, which is both traversed and not traversed, *intersected* [*entr'ouvert*]. Because of this indecision and instability, Plato would have conferred upon the double science arising from these two theaters the name *doxa* rather than *epistēmē*. *Pierrot Murderer of His Wife* would have reminded him of the riddle of the bat struck by the eunuch.<sup>34</sup>

34. "And again, do the many double things appear any the less halves than doubles?—None the less.—And likewise of the great and the small things, the light and the heavy things—will they admit these predicates any more than their opposites?—No, he said, each of them will always hold of, partake of, both.—Then each *is* each of these multiples rather than it *is not* that which one affirms it to be?—They are like those jesters who palter with us in a double sense at banquets, he replied, and resemble the children's riddle about the eunuch and his hitting of the bat—with what they signify that he struck it.\* For these things too equivocate, and it is impossible to conceive firmly any one of them to be or not to

Everything is played out, everything and all the rest—that is to say, the game—is played out in the *entre*, about which the author of the *Essai sur la connaissance approchée*, who also knew all about caves,<sup>35</sup> says that it is “a mathematical concept” (p. 32). When this undecidability is marked and re-marked in *writing*, it has a greater power of formalization, even if it is “literary” in appearance, or appears to be attributable to a natural language, than when it occurs as a proposition in logicomathematical form, which would not go as far as the former type of mark. If one supposes that the distinction, still a metaphysical one, between natural language and artificial language be rigorous (and we no doubt here reach the limit of its pertinence), one can say that there are texts in so-called natural languages whose power of formalization would be superior to that attributed to certain apparently formal notations.

One no longer even has the authority to say that “between” is a purely syntactic function. Through the re-marking of its semantic void, it in fact begins to signify.<sup>36</sup> Its semantic void *signifies*, but it signifies spacing and articulation; it has as its meaning the possibility of syntax; it orders the play of meaning. *Neither purely syntactic nor purely semantic*, it marks the articulated opening of that opposition.

The whole of this dehiscence, finally, is repeated and partially opened up in a certain “*lit*” [“bed,” “reads”], which *Mimique* has painstakingly set up. Toward the end of the text, the syntagm “*le lit*” reproduces the stratagem of the hymen.

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be or both or neither. . . . But we agreed in advance that if anything of that sort should be discovered, it must be denominated opinable, not knowable, the wanderer between being caught by the faculty that is betwixt and between” (the *Republic* V, 479 b, c, d, trans. Paul Shorey, p. 719). [\*Francis M. Cornford, in his edition of the *Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), glosses the riddle as follows (p. 188): “A man who was not a man (eunuch), seeing and not seeing (seeing imperfectly) a bird that was not a bird (bat) perched on a bough that was not a bough (a reed), pelted and did not pelt it (aimed at it and missed) with a stone that was not a stone (pumice-stone).”—Trans.]

35. The chapter of *La Terre et les rêveries du repos* [*Earth and Dreams of Rest*] which deals with *caves* does not, however, mention Mallarmé’s in its rich survey of various “caves in literature.” If this fact is not simply insignificant, the reason for it may perhaps appear later in the course of our discussion of Mallarmé’s “imaginary.”

36. From that point on, the syncategorem “between” contains as its meaning a semantic quasi-emptiness; it signifies the spacing relation, the articulation, the interval, etc. It can be nominalized, turn into a quasi-categorem, receive a definite article, or even be made plural. We have spoken of “betweens,” and this plural is in some sense primary. *One* “between” does not exist. In Hebrew, *entre* can be made plural: “In truth this plural expresses not the relation between one individual thing and another, but rather the intervals between things (*loca aliis intermedia*)—in this connection see chapter 10, verse 2, of Ezechiel—or else, as I said before, this plural represents preposition or relation abstractly conceived.” (Spinoza, *Abrégé de grammaire hébraïque* [Vrin, 1968], p. 108.)

Before we come to that, I would like to recall the fact that in this *Mimique*, which is cannily interposed between two silences that are breached or broached thereby ("*Silence, sole luxury after rimes . . . there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading.*"), as a "gambol" or "debate" of "language" (figure II), it has never been a question of anything other than reading and writing. This text could be read as a sort of handbook of literature. Not only because the metaphor of writing comes up so often ("*a phantom . . . white as a yet unwritten page*")—which is also the case in the *Philebus*—but because the necessity of that metaphor, which *nothing* escapes, makes it something other than a particular figure among others. What is produced is an absolute extension of the concepts of writing and reading, of text, of hymen, to the point where nothing of what *is* can lie beyond them. *Mimique* describes a scene of writing within a scene of writing and so on without end, through a structural necessity that is marked in the text. The mime, as "corporeal writing" (*Ballets*), mimes a kind of writing (hymen) and is himself written in a kind of writing. Everything is reflected in the medium or speculum of reading-writing, "*without breaking the mirror.*" There is writing without a book, in which, each time, at every moment, the marking tip proceeds without a past upon the virgin sheet; but there is also, *simultaneously*, an infinite number of booklets enclosing and fitting inside other booklets, which are only able to issue forth by grafting, sampling, quotations, epigraphs, references, etc. Literature voids itself in its limitlessness. If this handbook of literature meant to *say* something, which we now have some reason to doubt, it would proclaim first of all that there is no—or hardly any, ever so little—literature; that in any event there is no essence of literature, no truth of literature, no literary-being or being-literary of literature. And that the fascination exerted by the "is," or the "what is" in the question "what is literature" is worth what the hymen is worth—that is, not exactly nothing—when for example it causes one to die laughing. All this, of course, should not prevent us—on the contrary—from attempting to find out what has been represented and determined under that name—"literature"—and why.

Mallarmé *reads*. He writes while reading; while reading the text written by the Mime, who himself reads in order to write. He reads for example the *Pierrot posthume* so as to write with his gestures a mimic that owes that book nothing, since he reads the mimic he thus creates in order to write after the fact the booklet that Mallarmé is reading.

But does the Mime read his role in order to write his mimic or his booklet? Is the initiative of reading his? Is he the acting subject who knows how to read what he has to write? One could indeed believe that although he is passive in reading, he at least has the active freedom to choose to begin to

read, and that the same is true of Mallarmé; or even that you, dear everyreader, retain the initiative of reading all these texts, including Mallarmé's, and hence, to that extent, in that place, you are indeed attending it, deciding on it, mastering it.

Nothing could be less certain. The syntax of *Mimique* imprints a movement of (non-Platonic) simulacrum in which the function of "*le lit*" ["the bed," "reads it," "reads him"] complicates itself to the point of admitting a multitude of subjects among whom you yourself are not necessarily included. Plato's clinical paradigm is no longer operative.

The question of the text is—(for whom are) / (for whoever reads) these sheets. [*La question du texte est—pour qui le lit*; literally, can mean both: "The question of the text is for the one who reads it (or him)" and: "The question of the text is: whom is the bed for?"—Trans.]

Among diverse possibilities, let us take this: the Mime does not read his role; he is also ready *by* it. Or at least he is both read and reading, written and writing, between the two, in the suspense of the hymen, at once screen and mirror. As soon as a mirror is interposed in some way, the simple opposition between activity and passivity, between production and the product, or between all concepts in -er and all concepts in -ed (signifier/signified, imitator/imitated, structure/structured, etc.), becomes impracticable and too formally weak to encompass the graphics of the hymen, its spider web, and the play of its eyelids.

This impossibility of identifying the path *proper* to the letter of a text, of assigning a unique place to the subject, of locating a simple origin, is here consigned, plotted by the machinations of the one who calls himself "profoundly and scrupulously a syntaxer." In the sentence that follows, the syntax—and the carefully calculated punctuation—prevent us from ever deciding whether the subject of "reads" is the role ("*less than a thousand lines, the role, the one that reads . . .*") or some anonymous reader ("*the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards . . .*") Who is "the one?" "*The one*" ["*qui*"] may of course be the indefinite pronoun meaning "whoever," here in its function as a subject. This is the easiest reading; the role—whoever reads it will instantly understand its rules. Empirical statistics would show that the so-called "linguistic sense" would most often give this reading.

But nothing in the grammatical code would render the sentence incorrect if, without changing a thing, one were to read "the one" (subject of "reads") as a pronoun whose antecedent was "*role*." Out of this reading would spring a series of syntactic and semantic transformations in the function of the words "*role*," "*le* [it or him]," "*placed*," and in the meaning of the word "*comprehend*." Thus: "*Less than a thousand lines, the role*

(subject, not object), *the one* (referring back to "role") *that reads* [the one that reads "*him*," not "*it*"] (referring to the Mime, the subject of the preceding sentence), *will instantly comprehend* (embrace, contain, rule, organize: read) *the rules as if placed before the stageboards* (the role is placed facing the stage, either as the author-composer, or as the spectator-reader, in the position of the "whoever" in the first hypothesis), *their humble depository*."

This reading is possible. It is "normal" both from the syntactic and from the semantic point of view. But what a laborious artifice! Do you really believe, goes the objection, that Mallarmé consciously parceled out his sentence so that it could be read two different ways, with each object capable of changing into a subject and vice versa, without our being able to arrest this movement? Without our being able, faced with this "*alternative sail*," to decide whether the text is "*listing to one side or the other*" (*A Throw of Dice*). The two poles of the reading are not equally obvious: but the syntax at any rate has produced an effect of indefinite fluctuation between two possibilities.

Whatever might have been going on in Mallarmé's head, in his consciousness or in his unconscious, does not matter to us here; the reader should now know why. That, in any event, does not hold the least interest for a reading of the text. Everything in the text is interwoven, as we have seen, so as to do without references, so as to cut them short. Nevertheless, for those who are interested in Stéphane Mallarmé and would like to know what he was thinking and meant to do by writing in this way, we shall merely ask the following question. But we are asking it on the basis of texts, and published texts at that: how is one to explain the fact that the syntactic alternative frees itself only in the third version of the text? How is one to explain the fact that, some words being moved, others left out, a tense transformed, a comma added, then and only then does the one-way reading, the only reading possible in the first two versions, come to shift, to waver, henceforth without rest? and without identifiable reference? Why is it that, when one has written, without any possible ambiguity, this: "This marvelous bit of nothing, less than a thousand lines, whoever will read it as I have just done, will comprehend the eternal rules, just as though facing the stageboards, their humble depository" (1886),

and then this: "This role, less than a thousand lines, whoever reads it will comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards, their humble depository" (1891),

one should finally write this, with all possible ambiguity: "*Less than a thousand lines, the role, the one that reads, will instantly comprehend the rules as if placed before the stageboards, their humble depository*" (1897)?

Perhaps he didn't know what he was doing? Perhaps he wasn't conscious

of it? Perhaps, then, he wasn't completely the author of what was being written? The burst of laughter that echoes deep inside the antre, in *Mimique*, is a reply to all these questions. They can only have been formulated through recourse to certain oppositions, by presupposing possibilities of decision whose pertinence was rigorously swept away by the very text they were supposed to question. Swept away by that hymen, the text always calculates and suspends (figure I) some supplementary "surprise" and "delight." "Surprise, accompanying the artifice of a notation of sentiments by unproffered sentences—that, in the sole case, perhaps, with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading." Supplement, principle, and bounty. The baffling economy of seduction. enter . . . between . . . a silence

*"Each session or play being a game, a  
fragmentary show, but sufficient at that  
unto itself..."*

[Le "Livre," 93 (A)]

# II

Like *Mimique*, the double session has no middle. It is divided into two halves<sup>37</sup> only through the fiction of a crease. Yet each session by itself is no more whole or symmetrical for all that, being but the rejoinder or application of the other, its play or its exercise. Together they are neither more nor less than two hemitropic crystals; never, in sum, a finished volume. Never making a complete turn, for lack of presentation.

Mallarmé indeed brought the Book he was turning out back to the “necessity of folding”:

37. Between the two sessions the following letter from Philippe Sollers is—necessarily—inscribed:

“le 12 (minuit).

MIMIQUE, ou plutôt mi + mi + que, c’est-à-dire deux fois les moitiés plus l’indication ou l’intimation subjonctive de la subordination mimée; mi-mais? mais-qui? mimi à que (ue)? queue de mémé?

Le *si* lance et défie le texte en excès comme ce qui succède—dans l’après mi-dit—à la répétition du rire en écho mimé (rimé) l’arrivée d’*or* étant tout d’abord musique (or-chestre) et cela fait (si + or) = *soir* au milieu des rôles et du lustre qui ment—synode meurtrier, silence tué—

(*synodique*: temps qui s’écoule entre deux nouvelles lunes consécutives)—pas tant qu’il ne soient freinés—

LIT/DES (il y en a *des* qui sont dans le *lit*) (scène primitive) (coup de dés)—queue déliant l’idée—

la scène ne rend pas illustre, sous le lustre, que lit le dés (ir)—

le vice est plus près des cieux que le rêve, sacré—

ça crée en cédant au rêve—en s’aidant au rêve—

pas de cadeau non plus (présent) apparent—le fantasma blanc—procédant,

procréant—

plissement du con, pénétration du père

(ô père)

per/pro

foutre futur passé glacé opéra—

mimère—

L’l mène—

Le MIME (neutre) est un demi-moi opéré, infini borné dans son unique stalle pur de toute

read from the bottom

— — — — —  
 and  
 .V V. .V V.  
 necessity of folding

and have the book  
 present itself  
 thus

[77(B)]

end return

of the same—but almost other [78(B)]  
 serial—  
 folds on each side

tucked in, at the cleft

and because of that  
 the addition of a  
 sheet the other way around  
 against

death  
 rebirth?

for +

one never rediscovers  
 a fold in the opposite  
 sense

—there is another sheet  
 to (cor)respond to the possibility  
 of that other sense.

the fold that on one  
 side alone—  
 stops the glance—  
 and masks

series of folds  
 gilt edge—  
 a cardboard box  
 in (as in the old days  
 on the binding)  
 [44(A)]

fiction, un demi-lieu et un demi-dieu—  
 retour des règles—

mime/milieu = moins/millier

(qu'y le lit/qui le l'y) (lie)

très tôt en dépôt : s'y taire

lignes : phrases-points, que/con, sur-prise liée—

au temps cité, luxe du silence ferré : *un si lance en qu'or*—

condition d'hélice au regard feuilleté : dés lisses—

[For a translation of this letter, see "Translator's Introduction"—Trans.]



The necessity of folding the page of the hymen does not involve, after the fact, a secondary procedure. You will not have been required to flex back upon itself a surface that was at first smooth and flat. The hymen, "at the cleft," does not come to adopt, here or there, some fold, indifferent as to whether you are imposing it or refusing it. In the morgue of all Pierrots, you have been able to read that the folding was being marked *in* the hymen, in the angle or cleft, in the *entre* by which, dividing itself, it related back to itself. Yet neither (is it) a fold in the veil or in the pure text but rather in the lining which the hymen, of itself, was. But by the same token *is* not: the fold in a lining by which it is, out of itself, in itself, at once its own outside and its own inside; between the outside and the inside, making the outside enter the inside and turning back the antre or the other upon its surface, the hymen is never pure or proper, has no life of its own, no proper name. ✂ Opened up by its anagram, it always seems torn, already, in the fold through which it affects itself and murders itself.

Along the undiscoverable line of this fold, the hymen never presents itself. It never *is*—in the present—; it has no proper, literal meaning; it no longer originates in meaning as such, that is, as the meaning of being. The fold renders (itself) manifold but (is) not (one).

In the title spot of this session, if you suspend the *fold*, you will find a use for some such epigraph as this:

"To detach myself from the idea of being — would that make me one or would I still be outside? I think it would be to stay outside inside, by being there, and to be there is to remain not above Evil but rather *inside*, and to be Evil itself, the kind of evil it takes God to satiate, the hymen of the Morgue, which is the fact that the fold has never been a fold..."<sup>38</sup>

As in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which begins with a theory of games and an encomium of the "analyst" who "is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics"—all of this merits rereading—it is a matter of operating along the fold, by displacing the final quotation in the story: "*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas* [in French in Poe's text; it means "denying what is, and explaining what is not"—Trans.]" Edgar Allan Poe: Mallarmé called him "the absolute literary case." His is also the only proper name, it seems, to appear in the notes toward the "Book." Is this without significance? On a sheet<sup>39</sup> on which every word is crossed out, we find:

38. Antonin Artaud (June 1945).

39. It is the first sheet.

finish  
 conscience  
 And pains           +  
                           +  
                           rue  
  
           +  
 childhood  
 double  
       their  
 crowd +  
       +                   a — crime — sewer

And on the following page:

I revere Poe's opinion, no vestige of any philosophy,  
 ethics or metaphysics, will pierce through;  
 I would add that it is necessary, enclosed and latent.

Further on, on the same page:

The intellectual armature of the  
 poem, conceals itself and—takes place—holds in the space that  
   isolates the stanzas and  
 among the blankness of the white paper; a significant silence that it  
 is no less lovely to compose than  
 verse.

To deny what is, to explain what is not, cannot here be reduced to some  
 dialectical operation; at most, it constitutes *mimed* dialectics. The intermis-  
 sion or interim of the hymen does not establish time: neither time as the  
 existence of the concept (Hegel), nor lost time nor time regained, and still  
 less the moment or eternity. No present in truth presents itself there, not  
 ✱ even in the form of its self-concealment. What the hymen undoes, outwits,  
 under the rubric of the present (whether temporal or eternal), is the  
 assurance of mastery. The critical desire—which is also the philosophical  
 desire—can only, as such, attempt to regain that lost mastery. That desire  
 tends to read the hymen alternately according to this or that species of  
 presence: the work of writing *against* time or the work of writing *effected by*  
 time.

*Working against Time.* According to Jacques Scherer, the "*false appearance of a present*" amounts to the granting of a greater degree of presence or reality to a future present or a past present, or even to an eternal present:

Another essential element of dramaturgy that Mallarmé rejects is time. He praises a pantomime in the following unexpected terms: "The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action . . . here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, *under the false appearance of a present*." His elimination of action necessarily entails an elimination of time, and, denying the temporal reality of theater, which he calls a false appearance, he is led to grant a less illusory reality, paradoxically enough, to the future and the past. Elsewhere in his work it is Villiers de l'Isle-Adam who appears as the hero of atemporal theater. Mallarmé describes in the following terms the effect produced by the prestigious narrator called Villiers: "Mid-nights thrown off with indifference by a man standing next to himself at his own wake; time became null, those nights." Villier's talent thus enables him to cancel out not only his own existence, but time itself: theater takes us out of the temporal flow by introducing us into time regained, or eternity.<sup>40</sup>

*Work Effected by Time.* If the interim of the hymen differs (defers) from the present, or from a present that is past, future, or eternal, then its sheet has neither inside nor outside, belongs neither to reality nor to the imaginary, neither to the original nor to its representation. The syntax of its fold makes it impossible for us to arrest its play or its indecision, to fix it on any one of its terms, to stop, for example, as Richard has done, on the mental or the imaginary. Such a stopping of the works would subsume "*Mimique*" within a philosophical or critical (Platonico-Hegelian) interpretation of *mimēsis*. It would be incapable of accounting for that excess of syntax over meaning (doubled by the excess of the "*entre*" over the opposition syntactic/semantic); that is, for the re-marking of textuality. Interestingly, it is now to the workings of *time* itself, and not to atemporality, that Richard attributes the process of unrealization designed to return writing to its proper element: the mental or the imaginary. Those are his words:

40. *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé*, p. 41. In citing Jacques Scherer or, in a moment, Jean-Pierre Richard, I want to stress what should in fact be obvious: that what I am doing is marking the most rigorous need for the "critical" operation and not launching some polemic, or even less seeking to discredit, however slightly, some admirable pieces of work. Every reader of Mallarmé today knows what he owes such work.

If we seek a still more perfect phantom, we encounter the *mime*: "a phantom white as a yet unwritten page," a smooth stonelike figure whose only expression is silence. Far from interposing itself between the real and the mental, his body, which is entirely negative, will serve as a free field for the play of imaginary transcription. There are no longer any signs imposed here: this face is indeed only half there; it remains neutral, malleable, hypothetical. It is not transparent—that would eliminate the possibility of reading—but it is not opaque, either, since that would arrest the flight of the fiction; it succeeds in being perfectly *here* and *elsewhere*, *now* and *then*: "hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present." What the theater indeed aims to abolish in each of its creations is actuality as well as materiality. The work of unrealization and vaporization is henceforth entrusted to time itself: like the woman in the *Phénomène futur* and so many other Mallarméan creations, the mime oscillates within a double call to the imagination, a call both from the future and from the past.<sup>41</sup>

The demonstration of this point is developed and explained further: the work of the temporal fiction, the "dreamed-of crossing of an interval," the "lie," have as their aim the "*playing*" of some "*imaginary* being," the "rediscovery of the transcendence of the great yonder," in order that "we may aesthetically rejoin *our own* transcendental truth . . ."

And the mirror, too, reverses its dreamlike function: while once it bespoke the painful inaccessibility of being, now it serves to *play* a being that is inaccessible but nonetheless real, an *imaginary* being. Out of the *here* and *now*, objectified in flesh that is both opaque and contingent, theater and pantomime claim to rediscover the transcendence of the great yonder . . . The theatrical world's existence is solely mental: under that heading one can only gain access to it by detaching oneself from the everyday world, through the dreamed-of crossing of an interval. In the form of a theatrical body, a mime's white face, or vaporous coatings of music, this interval naturally finds its model in the Mallarméan epitome of all intervals, the *windowpane*. Everything is thus turned upside down, yet everything remains the same. Transparency once signified "the azure," but barred access to it. It is now

41. Richard, pp. 406–7.

what supports, or better, gives life to, introduces among things, a new dream of Beauty. But this beauty is also nothing other, as we know, than a glorious lie, a pure creation of the mind. It is this lie that art attempts to render true, and for that it must, theatrically or artistically, put it *under glass*. The mirror henceforth constitutes the sensible field of illusion; it calls us toward it, makes us glide toward a mirage. No longer an obstacle, transparency has now become an instrument: the god it points to is within ourselves, not outside us in some celestial yonder, but imaginarily this makes little difference. If theater vitrifies its characters, if art puts the world under glass, if literature works toward the bleaching and airing of the object by means of language, it is nonetheless still in order that, through all this, we may aesthetically rejoin *our own* transcendental truth; in order that, in short, we may inject into all this the necessary dimension of the beyond. (Pp. 407–8; Richard's italics)

This "under glass" structure cannot be described, only interpreted. That, at least, is the interpretation with which we will henceforth be concerned, no doubt distractedly, from digression to digression, but without letup.

Who would think of denying the evidence of this "work of unrealization and vaporization," this idealization of "actuality" and "materiality" in Mallarmé's text? With the proviso, that is, that one read it under glass. And that one take into account the *process* of vitrification and not discount the "production" of the glass. This "production" does not consist—any more than does the hymen—simply in unveiling, revealing, presenting; nor in concealing or causing to disappear all at once; nor in creating, inventing, or inaugurating. If the structure of this glass has anything in common with that of the hymen, then its role is to dislocate *all* these oppositions. The glass must be read as a text, or, as it would have been called not long ago, as an undecidable "signifier." It will soon be proven that the effect of the signifier *verre* (glass) is almost indistinguishable from that of the signifier *vers* (verse).

Who would think of denying the evidence that for Mallarmé the world of theater is a mental world? With the proviso, of course, that one read it under glass. Mallarmé does indeed speak of "the mental medium identifying stage and house" (p. 298). And isn't the book the internalization of theater, the inner stage? In any such "ideal performance," "a theater, inherent in the mind, whoever has looked at nature with a steady eye carries it within him, a compendium of types and concordances; just as these are

confronted by the volume that opens its parallel pages" (p. 328). These propositions—and the long series of their equivalents<sup>42</sup>—*mime* the internalization of the theater in the book and of the book in the "mental medium." The mimed operation does not, however, sum up the outside inside the inside; it does not plant the theater inside the enclosure of a mental hideaway nor reduce space itself to the imaginary. On the contrary, in *inserting* a sort of spacing into interiority, it no longer allows the inside to close upon itself or be identified with itself. The book is a "block" but it is a block composed of sheets of paper. Its "cubic perfection" is *open*.<sup>43</sup> This impossibility of closure, this dehiscence of the Mallarméan book as an "internal" theater, constitutes not a reduction but a *practice* of spacing. Staked on the structure of the fold and of supplementarity, this practice puts itself into play.

And hence it has to be set back on the track of its own movement: it has, literally, to be *quoted*. To write the word *insertion*—a word that here operates with all its energy according to all its possibilities ("To place within. To insert a graft just under the bark. . . . By extension, to introduce into a text or register." Littré)—so as to mark the breaking through of theater into the book, of spacing into interiority, while a certain mimic inscribes a graft in one corner, holding the antre open, "at the cleft," in the intimate recesses of a volume coiled around itself and henceforth disemboweled by "the introduction of a weapon or paper-cutter" just as it is parted from itself; to write the word *insertion* is, literally, to quote: "Another, the art of Mr. Maeterlinck who also inserted theater into the book!" (p. 329). To write the *open antre* [*antre ouvert*] of the stage by the book is, literally, to quote: ". . . now the book will attempt to suffice, to open into [*entr'ouvrir*] the interior scene and whisper its echos" (p. 328). To write that such a movement plays along a structure of supplementarity, surplus, and vicariousness is, literally, to quote: "With two pages and the verses they contain, I, and the accompaniment of all myself, make up for the world [*supplée au monde*]! or I perceive, discreet, its drama" (ibid.). Here, supplementarity is not, as it apparently or consciously is in Rousseau, a unilateral movement which, falling from inside to out, loses in space both the life and the warmth of the spoken

42. One could cite the whole of *Crayonné au théâtre*. This, for example: "A work of the genre of the one our Théodore de Banville has offered in all his vigor and wisdom is literary in essence, but does not entirely espouse all the folds involved in the play of that mental instrument par excellence, the book!" (p. 335). Or this: ". . . delightful ambiguity between the written and the acted, neither quite one nor quite the other, which pours forth, the volume being almost set aside, the impression that one is not altogether in front of the stage" (pp. 342–44).

43. Jean-Pierre Richard, pp. 565 ff.

word; it is the excess of a signifier which, in its own inside, makes up (for) space and repeats the fact of opening. The book, then, no longer repairs, but rather repeats, the process of spacing, along with what plays, loses, and wins itself in it. This, too, is literally to quote: "A book, held in our hand, if it enunciates some august idea, makes up for all theaters, not by casting them all into oblivion, but by imperiously calling them to mind, on the contrary" (p. 334). Far from replacing the stage or substituting a perfectly mastered interiority for the slipping away of space, this *suppléance* [addition/representation] implacably retains and repeats the theatrical stage within the book. Such is the relation of *Planches et feuillets* [*Stageboards and Sheets of Paper*: title of Mallarmé's essay from which most of the preceding quotations are taken.—Trans.]<sup>44</sup>

One would clearly find no lack of references and documents to support the claim that the theatrical world is a mental world, or even an imaginary representation. With the proviso that, in *quoting* this proposition, one set it in motion, that one space it out in order to deploy what is implicit in it, displacing it and turning it around so as to let its pivot show: the mental world is already a stage; the inside of the *mens*, like the intimacy of the book that is folded back on itself, has the structure of a spacing. The spaciousness of writing, provided one takes into account the hymen of the act of miming, prohibits the ranking of the Mallarméan *fiction* in the category of the imaginary. For that category is in fact constructed out of the *ontological* interpretation of *mimēsis*. This is what we found in the course of the other session. But for that same reason, one cannot simply replace the values of the imaginary or the mental with those of actuality, reality, or even materiality, at least not if one does so by symmetrical inversion or by a simple reversal of the asymmetry.

44. It can only be a graphics of supplementarity, as we have attempted to show elsewhere, that can account for the relations between the concepts of Literature and Nature, between the "beyond" or the "nothing" and that to which it is added, the sum total of what is, or Nature. "Yes, Literature exists and, if you will, alone, excepting everything. . . . We know, captives of an absolute formula that, of course, there is nothing but what is. However, incontinent(ly) to put aside, under a pretext, the lure, would point up our inconsequence, denying the pleasure that we wish to take: for that *beyond* is its agent, and its motor might I say were I not loath to operate, in public, the impious dismantling of (the) fiction and consequently of the literary mechanism, so as to display the principal part or nothing. . . .

What is that for—

For play. . . .

For my part, I ask nothing less of writing and am going to prove this postulate.

Nature takes place; it can't be added to. . . ." (*La Musique et les Lettres*, pp. 646–47). For a reading of this text as well as an interpretation of the entirety of Mallarmé's writing, see Philippe Sollers, "Littérature et totalité" (in *Logiques*) and Julia Kristeva, "Poésie et négativité" (in *Σημειωτική*).

This chain ("fiction," "hymen," "spacious," etc.), itself both spacious and mobile, *gets caught in*, but thereby disorganizes, the whole ontological machine. It dislocates all oppositions. It carries them off, impresses upon them a certain play that propagates itself through all the text's moving parts, constantly shifting them, setting them out of phase, more or less regularly, through unequal displacements, abrupt slowdowns or bursts of speed, strategic effects of insistence or ellipsis, but always inexorably. It is in this way that the "Book," the "Mind," the "Idea"—the most spectacular examples of this grand scene—begin to function like signifiers unhooked, dislodged, disengaged from their historic polarization. "The book, the total expansion of the letter, must draw from it, directly, a kind of mobility and, spacious, through correspondences, institute a play, one doesn't know, which confirms the fiction.

"Nothing fortuitous there, where chance seems to capture the idea, the machinery is the equal: not to judge, in consequence, these words—industrial or having to do with materiality: the manufacture of the book, as a whole about to issue forth, begins, as of one sentence. From time immemorial, the poet, concerned with the place for this line, in the sonnet that inscribes itself for the mind or upon pure space" (p. 380).

The letter, and what this spaciousness draws from it, through folding, flexing back, deploying, expanding, must now be considered, contemplated, and have its design retraced. We must determine the structure of Mallarmé's spacing, calculate its effects, and deduce its *critical* consequences. The pivoting of the proposition ("the mental world is already a theatrical scene") does not exempt us from—on the contrary requires of us—the posing of this question: "when," "how," "why," is that scene played *outside*, outside the mind, in the form of "theater" or "literature"? In order to set this question into its entire stratified network (following the classical distributions under "history," "economics," "psychoanalysis," "politics," etc.), it is necessary first to make clear the specific law governing this "theatrical" or "literary" effect. It is this (pre)liminary question that retains us here. But this question has also, explicitly, presented itself as the question of *the liminary*. And since this question, at least in the scene in which it is being treated here, engages and interrogates along the couplings of its concepts the very syntax of its pairs of opposing terms, the ground of its presuppositions, the entirety of the discourse in which one could articulate the question of the "entire-field" (as a question, and hence as a discourse, if one were to assume that it has any *real margins*), one can already sense that a crisis is on the march as of the very first step. One must deduce its *critical* consequences: those that would affect Mallarméan criticism, and eventually criticism in general, which is linked, as its name indicates, to



the possibility of decidability, to the κρύνειν; but also the critical effects that a certain re-mark or re-tempering of spacing produces upon literary operations, upon "literature," which thereby goes into crisis.

That the blanks of this spacing and the crisis of literature are not foreign to the writing of a certain hymen (the feint of a veil in its fictive tear or fold) is set out by *Crise de vers* [*Crisis of verse*] for us to read and to traverse. That text, which exhibits a modernity that could be judged untimely, puts the dots on the *i*'s. With its little suspended dot, the *i* continually pricks and rips through—or almost—the veil, reaches a decision—or almost—about the text, as do so many Mallarméan *i*'s. Witness:

"Our phase, of recent times, is, if not closing, reaching a stop or perhaps an awareness: some attention sifts out the creative and relatively certain will.

"Even the press, whose information is usually twenty years old, is suddenly, on the correct date, busying itself with the subject.

"Literature is here undergoing an exquisite crisis, down to its very foundation.

"He who grants a place, or the primary place, to this function can recognize therein the current event: we are witnessing, as the century nears its finale, not as it was in the previous one, an upheaval; but, far from the public square, a certain disquiet stirs the veil in the temple with significant crinklings [*plis*] and, a little bit, its rending" (p. 360).

With its critical, pointed, sharpened dot, the *i* here signs the exquisite crisis "literature" is going through with significant crinkles and folds which—the hymen again—tear it "a little bit" without tearing it, fastening down the tissue. Beneath the fictive letting go of its highest point, suspended in the air (*r* [pronounced "air"—Trans.] is another seminal letter in *Crise de vers*), as if cut off from itself, the *i* draws its slash, applies its quill or its wing, its penna; it needles and scratches, assigns a place for criticism in the folds of writing, in "literary" writing or in the writing—so often called hieroglyphic—of dance, ballet, and theater.

Let us pretend to take leave of *Crise de vers* in order to read two other texts, to do no more than read them, for lack of the infinite amount of time one would need (but we will try to formalize this demand for infinite process), doing no more than recognizing the *i* as their "subject."

They are from *Crayonné au théâtre* [*Penciled at the Theater*], one page apart: (we will call them *Rejoinder I* and *Rejoinder II*).

*Rejoinder I.* "Criticism, in its integrity, is only, can only have value or stand almost equal to Poetry to which it contributes a noble complementary operation, if it aims, directly and superbly, also toward phenomena or the

universe: but, in spite of that, despite its status as a primordial instinct placed in the secret folds of our deepest inner recesses (a divine malaise), it gives in to the attractions of a theater that shows a mere representation, for those who are not meant to see things in themselves! of the play inscribed in the folio of the sky and mimed, with the gesture of his passions, by Man" (p. 294).

What will always defy and baffle criticism is this effect of being a supplementary double. There is always one extra rejoinder, one recess or representation too many, which also means one too few. The "recess": the Mallarméan fold will always have been not only a replication of the tissue but also a repetition-toward-itself of the text that is a re-folding, a replying, a supplementary re-marking of the fold. "Re-presentation": theater does not show "things in themselves," nor does it represent them; it shows a representation, shows itself to be a fiction; it is less engaged in setting forth things or the image of things than it is in setting up a machine.

*Rejoinder II.* The reader is now invited to count the dots, to follow the fine needlepoint pattern of *i*'s and *ique*'s [-ic or -ical] which are being sprinkled rapidly across the tissue being pushed by another hand. Perhaps he will be able to discern, according to the rapid, regular movement of the machine, the stitches of Mallarmé's idea, a certain instance of *i*'s and a certain scattering of dice [*d*'s]:<sup>45</sup>

"Ballet gives but little: it is an imaginative genre. When some sign of scattered general beauty—some flower, wave, cloud, jewel, etc.—is isolated for the eye, if, for us, the exclusive means of being sure of it consists in juxtaposing its appearance with our own spiritual nudity so that we can feel whether it fits and whether we can adapt it in some exquisite confusion of our nudity with that analogous form in flight—if only through the rite, there, the affirmation of the Idea, doesn't it seem as if the ballerina appears, part the element in question, part humanity eager to be one with it, in the floating of a reverie?"

A "floating," among the texts: the aerial suspension of the veil, the gauze, or even of gas (this is being written in the margins of the *Adaptation of Dutch Jewish Lamps to Gas*)<sup>46</sup> evolves according to the hymen. Each time it

45. TN. The word *idée* [idea] is composed of the two syllables in question here: *i* and *dé* [*dé* = the letter "d" and the word "dice"].

46. That page, in which it is possible to detect a watermark of all, or almost all, the other texts, is from *La Dernière Mode* (p. 736). The semantic condensation, like the index of a glossary, which goes along with the semblance of a description, collects itself of its own accord, incomparable in that it keeps adding to itself one application after another; that is, it produces its own fold, the fold of a writing or whatever one henceforth wants to call it.

appears, the word *floating* suggests what Mallarmé calls suggestion: barely revealing at all, on the point of disappearing, the indecision of that which remains suspended, neither this nor that, between here and there, and *hence* between this text and another, along with their ether, a "gas . . . both invisible and present" (p. 736). Between this and that hovers a penna, "the ballerina, part the element in question, part humanity eager to be one with it . . ." Between the two, there is both confusion *and* distinction ("exquisite confusion"), hymen, the dance of the penna, the flight of the Idea, *confusion exquise d'elle (d'aile)* [exquisite confusion of it (of the wing)] "with that analogous form in flight—if only through the rite, there, the affirmation of the Idea, doesn't it seem as if the ballerina appears, part the element in question, part humanity eager to be one with it, in the floating of a reverie." This floating, within the text, recalls "many an undecided floating of an idea deserting accidents . . ." (p. 289). The hesitations of the "veil" [*voile*], the "flight" [*vol*], the "leap" [*voltige*], as they condense down toward the point of an idea or of a dancer's toe (one should here reread the opening lines of *Crayonné au théâtre*), are always, *in addition*, descriptions/inscriptions of the structure and movement of the literary textile, a "hesitation" turning into writing. In folding it back upon itself, the text thus *parts* (with) reference, spreads it like a V, a gap that pivots on its point, a dancer, flower, or Idea. "One of them divulges his intuition, theoretically and, it may well be, vacuously, as of this date: he knows that such suggestions, touching on the literary art, ought to proclaim themselves firmly. The hesitation, however, to uncover everything abruptly of what does not yet exist, weaves, for modesty's sake, out of the general state of surprise, a veil.

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Again, it is a question of luminaries: even though the lustre is not named, it is possible to follow, within the infinite word-for-word play, "a horizontal stream of light" concerning which it is impossible to decide whether it should be considered written or spoken, proceeding as it does from a multitude of pens or mouths, that is, produced by *becs* [becs = "beaks," "pen nibs," and "gas burners."—Trans.] (" . . . six copper *becs*, each projecting a horizontal stream of light . . . that object, six tongues of flame held together by metal, suspends a merry Pentecost—no, a *star*, for in truth any impression of Judaic ritual has disappeared." Among the "different applications of this luminary," which illustrate *once again* the question of writing, we find the "work table" or the "study . . . where the master would linger during the premature September evenings").

Now [*Or*—this gas[light], so to speak, does not cross the threshold; it remains, veiled, on the doorstep: "Gas does not penetrate further, in our interiors, than the stairway or sometimes the landings: it can pass through the door of the apartment to light up the anterooms only in a vague, softened form, veiled by the transparent paper of a Japanese or Chinese lantern."

Richard, too, examines, from another viewpoint (p. 502), the theme of electricity, "gas and the sun" in *La Dernière Mode* (p. 825). On the phallic symbolism of pulley lamps, cf. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Joan Rivière (New York: Liveright Publishing Co, 1920), p. 138.

"Let us ascribe to daydreams, before the start of the reading, in an audience, the attention solicited by some fluttering white butterfly, at once everywhere, nowhere—it vanishes; yet not without leaving a bit of sharp, ingenuous nothing, to which I just reduced the subject, which has passed and re-passed, insistently, before the general astonishment" (p. 382).

Ever marking the threshold, this hesitation, suggestion, flotation, with its bit of sharpened nothing, this operation is about to break through—the hymen. Sewing the text together, here is what, with the *i*'s and the *ique* of *Mimique*, the subject is reduced to:

"... in the floating of a reverie? The operation or poetry, par excellence and theater. Immediately the ballet turns out allegorical: it will enlase as well as animate, so as to mark each rhythm, all correlations or Music, latent at first, between its postures and many a type, to such an extent that the figurative representation of earthly accessories by the Dance contains a test relative to their degree of esthetic quality; a consecration occurs therein, giving proof of our Treasures. To deduce the philosophical point at which the dancer's impersonality is located, between her feminine appearance and some mimed object, for what hymen: she sticks it with a confident point and sets it down; then unrolls our conviction in a cipher of pirouettes prolonged toward another motif . . ."

Let us freeze for a moment, just at this point, these cinematographic acrobatics. This entire paragraph is woven like a textile, a copious veil, a vast and supple fabric being spread out before us, but also being regularly stitched down. In the play of this tacking, there is nothing but text; the histological operation treats a tissue with the point of a sewing instrument that *at once* pierces and joins, strings together. The text—for what hymen—is at once cut through and gathered up. The "cipher of pirouettes prolonged toward another motif" is, like the whole of the text, ciphered to the second power. This is remarked by its cipher in that, while designating the dancer's pirouette as a cipher or hieroglyphic, it also enciphers the sign "pirouette," which it causes to pirouette or turn upon itself like a top, this time designating the movement of the sign itself. The cipher of pirouettes is also the pirouette as a cipher, as the movement of the signifier that refers, through the fiction of this or that visible dancing pirouette, to another pirouetting signifier, another "pirouette." In this way, the pirouette, like the dancer's pointed toe, is always just about to pierce with a sign, with a sharp bit of nothing, the page of the book or the virginal intimacy of the vellum. And hence, the dance of the signifier cannot be said to confine itself simply to the interior of a book or an imagination. Cf. *Le Genre ou des modernes* [*Genre, or Concerning Certain Moderns*]: ". . . its ill-concealed

gaslights immediately lighting up, in various general postures of adultery or theft, the imprudent actors in this banal sacrilege.

"I understand.

"Dance alone, from the fact of its evolutions, along with mime appears to me to necessitate real space, or the stage.

"Strictly speaking, a piece of paper would suffice to evoke any play: with the aid of his own multiple personality anyone could play it inside himself, which is not the case where pirouettes are concerned" (p. 315). As a pirouette, the dance of the hieroglyph cannot be played internally in its entirety. Not only because of the need for "real space, or the stage"; not only because of the point that pierces the page or the plate of the book; but most especially because of a certain lateral movement: in turning incessantly on its point, the hieroglyph, the sign, the cipher moves away from its "here and now," as if it were endlessly falling, forever here en route between here and there, from one here to the other, inscribing in the *stigmē* of its "here" the *other* point toward which it continually drifts, the other pirouette that, in each vaulting spin, in the whirls of flying tissue, is instantly remarked. Each pirouette is then, in its twirling, only the mark of another pirouette, totally other and yet the same. The "cipher of pirouettes prolonged toward another motif" thus suggests the line—which unites but also divides—between two "words" or "signifiers," for example between the two occurrences of the signifier "pirouette" which, from one text to the other and first of all in the blank space of the inter-text, entrain, entail, and encipher each other, moving about like silhouettes, cut out like black shadows against a white background, profiles without faces, sketches forever presented askew, turning around the shaft of a wheel, the invisible axis of writing, a potter's wheel endlessly spinning away.

This mute writing, like that of a circling bird,<sup>47</sup> rises up, removes its point at the very instant it jabs. On the page facing *Mimique*,<sup>48</sup> Mallarmé names "Dance . . . that subject, virginal as muslins . . ." He speaks of "living folds." The graphics of the hymen will perhaps nowhere have been so strongly stressed as here: "A certain framework, belonging to no woman

47. For all this [*pirouette*, *silhouette*, *muette* (mute), etc.—Trans.] will have been calculated to suggest the wing sweep or pen sweep of the signifier *ette*, which is to be found in the unmarked intertext or else in the other text, marked; for example—all geared to rhyme with *souhaite* [wish]—find *chouette* [owl], *alouette* [skylark], *fouette* [whip], *girouette* [weathercock], and even the little wheels of the *brouette* [wheelbarrow], sprinkled through the occasional verse (pp. 118, 119, 120, 122, 137). So many pennas to keep track of. Rhyming with the "wish [*souhait*] to see too much and not enough."

48. (P. 311). "We have no information on the origin of this fragment," note the editors of the *Oeuvres Complètes*.

in particular, whence its instability, through the veil of generality, exerts an attraction toward this or that fragment of form revealed and therein drinks the flash that renders it divine; or else exhales, in return, through an undulation of tissues, floating, palpitating, diffuse, this ecstasy. Yes, the suspense of the Dance, a contradictory fear or wish to see too much and not enough, requires a transparent prolongation . . . for some spiritual acrobatics ordering that one follow the slightest scriptural intention, exists, but remains invisible, in the pure motion and displaced silence stirred by the dance. The next-to-nudity, apart from a brief radiating of skirts, whether to muffle the fall or, inversely, to heighten the lifting of the pointed toes, reveals, first and last, two legs—bearing some other than personal signification, like a direct instrument of an idea."

While literature, theater, drama, ballet, dance, fable, and mimicry are all forms of writing that are subject to the law of the hymen, they nevertheless do not all form one and the same text. There is more than one kind of writing: the different forms and genres are irreducible. Mallarmé has sketched out their system. What these types of writing have in common has been propounded here as the rule of the *cast-aside-reference*, the *being aside*, or the hymen. The range of differentiation within this common rule could not have been better demonstrated than on the occasion of the *Two Pigeons*, apropos of which Mallarmé distinguishes between Drama, Ballet, and Mime. But only after recapitulating the generality of writing: the hymen, reference cast aside by difference (the double show and the difference between the sexes), the play of the penna (bird, wing, feather, quill, beak, etc.), and the process of metaphorical production incessantly being relaunched by the gap, or the setting-aside, of being. And this generality of writing is nothing other than the production, by writing, of generality: the weaving, along the gap of the referent, of this "veil of generality" "belonging to no woman in particular." Witness, in the case of the *Two Pigeons*, the syntax of the *point* [= "point" or "not"] and the *pas* [= "not" or "step"]: "Such, a reciprocity, from which results what is *un*-individual, in the prima donna and in the whole company, about the dancing being, never anything but emblem not someone . . .

"The judgment or axiom to affirm when it comes to ballet!

"That is, that the dancer *is not a woman dancing*, for these reasons juxtaposed that she *is not a woman* but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form (sword, cup, flower, etc.) and that *she is not dancing*, suggesting, through a marvel of short cuts or surges, with her bodily writing what it would take paragraphs of prose dialogue or description to express on paper: a poem freed from any scribe's equipment. . . . The

dance is wings; it concerns birds and takeoffs into the ever-after, along with returns as vibrant as an arrow. . . . One of the lovers shows them to the other, then shows himself, an initial language, comparison. Little by little the couple's demeanor turns, under the dovecote's influence, to a series of little pecks or leaps, swoons, until an invasion of aerial lasciviousness slips over them, with breathless resemblances. Once children, here they are birds, or the opposite, from birds they have become children, according to how one wishes to view the exchange in which forever after, he and she, would have to express the double game: perhaps the whole adventure of sexual difference! . . . with the intercalation of a celebration toward which everything will turn under a sudden storm, and then the anguishing lovers, one ready to flee and the other to forgive, will unite: it will be . . . You can imagine the hymn of the final triumphal dance in which the space put between the fiancés by the necessity of their journey diminishes down to the source of their joyful exhilaration!" Each pair in the circuit will always have referred to another pair, signifying *in addition* the very operation of signifying, the "initial language, comparison," the "double game" of the signifier, and "sexual difference" each indefinitely proposing itself as an example with respect to the others. Hence the dancer "sums up the subject through her divination mingled with pure, disturbing animality, designating at every turn uncompleted allusions, just as she invites, before any step, with two fingers, a quivering fold of her skirts and simulates an impatience of plumes toward the idea. . . . Then, through a kind of commerce whose secret her smile seems to pour forth, without delay she imparts to you, through the last veil that remains forever, the nudity of your own concepts, and silently proceeds to write your vision in the manner of a Sign, which she is."

While this difference opens up the common play of all types of writing, one neither can nor should erase the rigorous distinctions between the genres. One instance of "cheating" has already been denounced: the importation of Fable into Ballet: "With the exception of a distinctly perceived relation between the habitual demeanor of flight and many a choreographical effect, and then the importation, not without cheating, of Fable into Ballet, there remains a certain love story. . . ." <sup>49</sup>

All the "genres" of this generalized writing, including Fable, which actually tells a story, are distinguished by trace effects whose structure is in each case original. The different "silences," for example, never merge. "An arr holds the stage, a historical one in the case of Drama; with Ballet, on the

49. Pp. 305-7. Cf. also Richard, pp. 409-36.

other hand, it is emblematic. To be allied but not confused; it is not from the outset and by treating them as the same that one ought to join two attitudes jealous of their respective silences, mime and dance, suddenly hostile if forced into too close proximity. For an example illustrating this: while it might have been tempting, a moment ago, in order to render one and the same essence—that of a bird—through two performers, to imagine placing a mime beside a dancer; this is to confront too much difference! . . . The distinct trait of each theatrical genre that is brought into contact or opposed finds itself commanding the work, which employs the discrepancy in its very architecture: what remains is to find the communications among them. The librettist ordinarily does not know that the dancer, who expresses herself by means of steps, understands no other form of eloquence, not even gesture" (p. 306). "Always, theater alters, toward a special or literary point of view, the arts it adopts: music cannot contribute to it without losing some of its depth and shadow, nor song, its solitary lightning, and, strictly speaking, it is possible not to grant to Ballet the name of Dance; which latter is, in a sense, hieroglyphic" (p. 312).

The different genres, which do not fuse into a total art (an indication of Mallarmé's discreet, ironic, but insurmountable qualms about Wagner), nevertheless exchange properties according to the infinite circulation of the scriptural metaphor; they are congeneric in that they do not actually show anything at all, and are *conjoined* around an absent focus: the lustre again, from *Rejoinder II*: ". . . for what hymen: she sticks it with a confident point and sets it down; then unrolls our conviction in a cipher of pirouettes prolonged toward another motif, given the fact that everything, in the evolutions through which she illustrates the meaning of our ecstasies and triumphs sounded by the orchestra, is, as art itself demands, in the theater, *fictive or momentary*."

"Sole principle! and just as the lustre glistens, that is to say, itself, the prompt exhibition, under all its facets, of whatever, and our adamantite sight, a dramatic work shows the succession of exteriorities of the act without any moment's retaining any reality and that in the final analysis what happens is nothing."

\* | "Old-fashioned Melodrama, occupying the stage, conjointly with Dance, and also under the management of the poet, fulfills this law. Moved to pity, the perpetual suspense of a tear that can never be entirely formed nor fall (still the lustre) scintillates in a thousand glances, now, like gold, an ambiguous smile. . . ."

Now, once the crisis of literature has thus been remarked, would any criticism whatsoever—as such—be capable of facing up to it? Would such



criticism be able to lay claim to any *object*? Doesn't the project of the *κρίνειν* itself proceed precisely out of the very thing that is being threatened and put in question at the focal point of this remodeling, or, to use a more Mallarméan word, this re-tempering of literature? Wouldn't "literary criticism" as such be part of what we have called the *ontological* interpretation of mimesis or of metaphysical mimetologism?

It is in this de-limitation of criticism that we will henceforth be interested.

If we take into account a certain time lag and some significant historical developments, it can be said that the elements in Mallarmé's text that re-mark these "critical" boundaries have now been recognized. But this recognition cannot be reached by one viewer alone or in one fell swoop. It must be something other than mere recognition, and it must entail a certain stratified repetition. On the one hand, "contemporary criticism" has now recognized, studied, confronted, and *thematized* a certain number of *signifieds* that had long gone unnoticed, or at least had never been treated as such, systematically, for more than half a century of Mallarméan criticism. And on the other hand, the whole formal crafting of Mallarmé's writing has recently been analyzed in detail. But never, it seems, has the analysis of the way the text is assembled seemed to block access to the thematic level as such, or, more broadly, to meaning or the signified as such. Never has an overall meaning system or even a structural semantics seemed to be threatened or thwarted by the very progression or onward *march* of the Mallarméan text, and this according to the workings of a regular law. That law does not apply only to the text of "Mallarmé," even though he "illustrates" it according to a "historical" necessity whose entire field needs to be mapped out, and even though such an illustration entails a general reinterpretation of everything.

What we will thus be concerned with here is the very possibility of thematic criticism, seen as an example of modern criticism, at work wherever one tries to determine a meaning through a text, to pronounce a decision upon it, to decide that this or that *is* a meaning and that it is meaningful, to say that this meaning is posed, posable, or transposable as such: a theme.

It is obvious—and this will later receive further confirmation—that the fact that we have chosen to focus on the "blank" and the "fold" is not an accident. This is both because of the specific effects of these two elements in Mallarmé's text and precisely because they have systematically been recognized as *themes* by modern criticism. Now, if we can begin to see that the "blank" and the "fold" cannot in fact be mastered as themes or as meanings,

if it is within the folds and the blankness of a certain hymen that the very textuality of the text is re-marked, then we will precisely have determined the limits of thematic criticism itself.

Is it necessary to point out that *l'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* [Mallarmé's Imaginary Universe] (1961) remains the most powerful of all works of thematic criticism? It systematically covers the whole of the textual field of Mallarmé; or at least, it *would* do so if the structure of a certain crisscrossed groove (the blankness of a fold or the folding of a blank) did not turn the "whole" into the *too much* or the *too little* of the text. And vice versa. Thus, let us say, the whole of Mallarmé's textual field would be covered.

The questions we will ask of this book, for the same reason, will not be directed toward it as a "whole," the "whole" being the imaginary version of a text. They will be addressed to a certain determinate part of its procedure, particularly to the theoretical and methodological formulation of its project: its thematicism. In this, we will be dealing with the book on a level that is still too thematic. But one would not be able to redirect our own critique against us in the end without confirming its legitimacy and its principle.

At the point at which the theoretical project of the book is stated in the Preface, it is explained by means of two examples. Although these are given as two examples among many, and although what is exemplary or exceptional about them is never rigorously examined by Richard, it is not without cause that they have found their way to such a key position. The examples in question are precisely the "themes" of the "blank" and the "fold." We must here quote a long and beautifully written page of the Preface. Inquiring into "the very notion of a *theme*, on which [our] whole enterprise is based,"<sup>50</sup> Richard has just noted the "strategic value" or the "topological quality" of the theme. "Any thematics will thus derive both from cybernetics and from systematics. Within this active system, the themes will tend to organize themselves as in any living structure: they will combine into flexible groupings governed by the law of isomorphism and by the search for the best possible equilibrium. This notion of equilibrium, which first arises out of the physical sciences but whose crucial importance in sociology and psychology has been demonstrated by Claude Lévi-Strauss

50. I shall not go into the seemingly very particular problem posed by the transference of the word *theme*, in the sense in which Mallarmé indeed reproduces the definition in *Les Mots anglais*, to its conventional technical and grammatical sense (p. 962). For all sorts of reasons, is it not hard, "in applying it to fields other than philology" (Richard, p. 24), to consider oneself authorized to do so by Mallarmé?

and Jean Piaget, seems to us to be of considerable utility in the understanding of the realms of the imaginary. One can indeed observe how themes arrange themselves into antithetical pairs, or, in a more complex manner, into multiple compensating systems. In his dream of the idea, for example, Mallarmé appeared to us to oscillate between the desire for an opening (the idea bursting apart, *vaporized* into suggestion or silence) and a need for closure (the idea *summoned*, summed up in a contour or a definition). The closed and the open, the clear and the fleeting, the mediate and the immediate, these are a few of the mental pairings whose presence we believe we have discerned on a number of very diverse levels of the Mallarméan experience. The important thing is then to observe how these oppositions are resolved, how their tension is eased into new synthetic notions or into concrete forms that realize a satisfactory equilibrium. The opposition between the closed and the open thus engenders certain beneficent figures in which both contradictory needs can be satisfied, successively or simultaneously: for example the *fan*, the *book*, the *dancer* . . . The essence succeeds at once in summoning and in vaporizing itself in a synthetic phenomenon: *music*. At other times the equilibrium is established in a static manner, through a play of forces very precisely pitted against each other, whose total balance amounts to the euphoria of a 'suspension.' It is thus that Mallarmé himself indeed envisioned the internal reality of a poem and the ideal architecture of the objects the poem must reorder within itself: grottos, diamonds, spiderwebs, rose windows, kiosks, shells, all stand as so many images which translate the search for a total correlation of nature with itself, a perfect equalization of all things. The mind or spirit then becomes the keystone of this architecture, functioning as the absolute center through which everything communicates, balances out, and is neutralized (Mallarmé adds 'is annulled' . . .). Thus Mallarmé's thematics itself provides us with the technical tools needed for its own elucidation. What we have tried to do is to see how the profoundest tendencies of reverie succeed in going beyond their inherent conflict toward some state of equilibrium. To that end it was in fact enough to reread the most beautiful of the poems, where that balance is achieved effortlessly and spontaneously, poetic felicity—what is called 'felicity of expression'—being doubtless nothing other than the reflection of lived felicity, that is, a state in which a being's most contradictory needs are all satisfied at once, and even satisfy *each other*, in a harmony composed of connections, oscillations, or fusions" (pp. 26–27).

Let us interrupt the quotation for a moment. Not in order to ask—as Richard does not, throughout the length of the book—what "the most beautiful of the poems, where that balance is achieved effortlessly and

spontaneously" might be, but in order to point out a coherent group of concepts: "living structures," "law of isomorphism," "best possible equilibrium," "mental pairings," "beneficent figures," "synthetic phenomenon," "euphoria of a suspension," "total correlation of nature with itself," "happy states of equilibrium," "felicity of expression," "reflection of lived felicity," etc. These concepts belong to a critical "psychologism." Gerard Genette has analyzed the *transitive* character of this approach, along with its "sensualist" and "eudaemonist" postulates.<sup>51</sup> Using this concept of "reflection" (of "lived felicity"), so loaded with history and metaphysics, such a representative psychologism makes the text into a form of expression, reduces it to its signified theme,<sup>52</sup> and retains all the traits of mimetologism. What it retains in particular is that *dialecticity* that has remained profoundly inseparable from metaphysics, from Plato to Hegel.<sup>53</sup>

51. *Bonheur de Mallarmé? [Mallarméan Felicity?]* in *Figures* (Seuil, 1966), pp. 91 ff.

52. We will attempt to show elsewhere that this type of thematicism has as its very vocation to be eudemonistic or hedonistic (and vice versa), and that it is not in principle incompatible with Freud's psychoanalysis of the work of art, at least in the guise in which it operates in the essays prior to *The Uncanny* (1919) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), that is, particularly in the *Traumdeutung* (1900), *Der Witz...* (1905), *Gradiva* (1906), *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren* (1907), *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1916). Freud acknowledges that he is going beyond the formal limits of the text toward the theme (*Stoff*), or the author, and that that entails a number of inconsistencies. He analyzes the work as a *means* in the service of the pleasure principle *alone*: situating it between a preliminary pleasure (*Vorlust*) or bonus of seduction (*Verlockungsprämie*) produced by the formal achievement and a final pleasure linked to the releasing of tensions (*Der Dichter . . . in fine*). This does not mean that after 1919–20 such propositions will be entirely superseded, but they nevertheless will seem to circulate within a modified frame of reference. The problematics of this displacement still remains to be constituted.

Among the valuable biographical and other elements collected by Jones relating to this problem (*The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*), I will cite only a letter from 1914. This time Freud seems to be putting all pleasure on the side of form. And he betrays a surprising irritation toward those he categorizes rather strangely as "given up to the pleasure principle": "Freud remarked once in a letter to me describing an evening he had spent with an artist: 'Meaning is but little to these men; all they care for is line, shape, agreement of contours. They are given up to the *Lustprinzip*.' " (III, 412).

On this problem cf. also Sollers, "La Science de Lautréamont," in *Logiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) and Baudry, "Freud et la création littéraire" in *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968).

53. If one wishes to identify the specificity of the writing operation or of the operation of the textual signifier (the graphics of supplementarity or of the hymen), one must focus one's critique on the concept of *Aufhebung* or sublation [*relève*], which, as the ultimate mainspring of all dialecticity, stands as the most enticing, the most sublating, the most "relevant" way of (re)covering (up) that graphics, precisely because it is most similar to it. This is why it has seemed necessary to designate the *Aufhebung* as the decisive target (cf. *Of Grammatology*, p. 25). And since thematicism presents itself not only as a dialectic but also, and rightly so, as a "phenomenology of the theme" (p. 27), let us here recall by analogy the fact that it was the possibility of "undecidable" propositions that presented phenomenological discourse with such redoutable difficulties (Cf. my *Introduction to L'origine de la géométrie, de Husserl*, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 39 ff).

we have already shown in what way the dialectical structure is incapable of accounting for the graphics of the hymen, being itself comprehended and inscribed within the latter, almost indistinguishable from it, separated from it only by itself, a simple veil that constitutes the very thing that tries to reduce it to nothing: desire.

This dialectical intention animates the whole of Richard's thematicism, reaching its fullest expansion in the chapter entitled "The Idea" and in its subsection "Toward a dialectics of Totality." This dialectics of totality intervenes in the Preface just after the passage cited above, precisely in connection with the examples of the "blank" and the "fold": "If one wishes to approach the psychological reality of the theme from another angle, one can do so through that other product of the imagining function: the symbol. In a recent study of the work of M. Eliade, Paul Ricoeur gives an excellent analysis of the different modes of comprehension at our disposal for dealing with the symbolic world: his remarks could be applied with little modification to a phenomenology of the theme. The theme, too, 'makes us think'. To understand a theme is also to 'deploy [its] multiple valences': it is, for example, to see how Mallarmé's dream of the *blank* can incarnate now the ecstasy of virginity, now the pain of an obstacle or of frigidity, now the happiness of an opening, of a liberation, or of a mediation, and then to connect these diverse nuances of meaning into one single complex. One can also, as Ricoeur suggests, understand a theme through another theme, progressing from one to the other following 'a law of intentional analogy' until one has reached all the themes linked by relations of affinity. This would involve, for example, moving from the azure to the windowpane, to the blank paper, to the glacier, to the snowy peak, to the swan, to the wing, to the ceiling, not forgetting the lateral branchings that occur at each point in this progression (from the glacier to the melted water, to the blue eyes, and to the amorous bath; from the white paper to the black marks that cover and divide it; from the ceiling to the tomb, the priest, the sylph, and the mandolin). And finally, one can show how the same theme 'unifies several experiential and representational levels: the internal and the external, the vital and the speculative.' The Mallarméan figure of the *fold*, for example, enables us to join the erotic to the sensible, then to the reflective, to the metaphysical, and to the literary: the fold is at once sex, foliage, mirror, book, and tomb—all are realities it gathers up into a certain very special dream of intimacy" (pp. 27–28).

This passage (in which each connotation calls for analysis) is flanked by two brief remarks. One cannot, it seems, subscribe to it without acknowledging two objections in principle to the phenomenological, hermeneutic, dialectical project of thematicism. The first involves the differential or

diacritical character of language: "Then another difficulty arises: to construct a lexicon of frequencies is to suppose that from one occurrence to another the meaning of words remains fixed. But in reality, meaning varies; it is modified both within itself and according to the horizon of meanings that surround, sustain, and create it. Languages, as we now know, are *diacritical* realities; each element within them is in itself less important than the *gap* that distinguishes it from other elements. . . . Neither a mathematical study nor even an exhaustive list of themes can therefore ever account for their intention or their richness; what will above all be left out is the original relief of their system" (p. 25). Out of this fundamental diacriticity whose design should also be further complicated, we will later draw another consequence: a certain inexhaustibility which cannot be classed in the categories of richness, intentionality, or a horizon, and whose form would not be simply foreign to the order of mathematics. Nevertheless, it can be seen that even in the eyes of Richard himself, diacriticity already prevents a theme from being a theme, that is, a nuclear unit of meaning, posed there before the eye, present outside of its signifier and referring only to itself, in the last analysis, even though its identity as a signified is carved out of the horizon of an infinite perspective. Either diacriticity revolves around a nucleus and in that case any recourse to it remains superficial enough not to put thematicism as such into question; or else diacriticity traverses the text through and through and there is no such thing as a thematic nucleus, only theme *effects* that give themselves out to be the very thing or meaning of the text. If there is a textual system, a theme does not exist (. . . "no—a present does not exist . . ."). Or if it *does* exist, it will always have been unreadable. This kind of nonexistence of the theme in the text, this way in which meaning is nonpresent or nonidentical with the text, has in fact been recognized by Richard, however—this is the second of the two remarks mentioned above—in a note dealing with the problems of ordering and classifying themes. These problems are by no means secondary: "We cannot help admitting, however, that this order is far from satisfactory. For in fact it is actually the multiplicity of lateral relations that creates the *essence* of meaning here. A theme is nothing other than the sum, or rather the putting in perspective, of its diverse modulations" (p. 28. Similar remark on p. 555).

This concession still allows for the hope, the "dream," of reaching a sum and of determining a perspective, even if these are infinite. Such a sum or perspective would enable us to define, contain, and classify the different occurrences of a theme.

To this we would oppose the following hypotheses: the sum is impossible to totalize but yet it is not exceeded by the infinite richness of a content of meaning or intention; the perspective extends out of sight but without entailing the depth of a horizon of meaning *before* or *within* which we can never have finished advancing. By taking into account that "laterality" Richard mentions in passing, but by going on to determine its law, we shall define the limit otherwise: through the angle and the intersection of a re-mark that folds the text back upon itself without any possibility of its fitting back over or into itself, without any reduction of its spacing.

The fold, then, and the blank: these will forbid us to seek a theme or an overall meaning in an imaginary, intentional, or lived domain beyond all textual instances. Richard sees the "blank" and the "fold" as themes whose plurivalence is particularly rich or exuberant. What one tends not to see, because of the abundance of his sample, is that these textual effects are rich with a kind of poverty, I would even call it a very singular and very regular monotony. One does not see this because one thinks one is seeing themes in the very spot where the nontheme, that which cannot become a theme, the very thing that has no meaning, is ceaselessly re-marking itself—that is, disappearing.

All this in the movement of a fan. The polysemy of "blanks" and "folds" both fans out and snaps shut, ceaselessly. But to read Mallarme's *éventail* [fan] involves not only an inventory of its occurrences (there are hundreds, a very large but finite number if one sticks to the word itself, or an infinite number of diverse possibilities if one includes the many-faceted figure of wings, pages, veils, sails, folds, plumes, scepters, etc., constituting and reconstituting itself in an endless breath of opening and/or closing); it involves not only the description of a phenomenological structure whose complexity is also a challenge; it is also to remark that the fan re-marks itself: no doubt it designates the empirical object one thinks one knows under that name, but then, through a tropic twist (analogy, metaphor, metonymy), it turns toward all the semic units that have been identified (wing, fold, plume, page, rustling, flight, dancer, veil, etc., each one finding itself folding and unfolding, opening/closing with the movement of a fan, etc.); it opens and closes each one, but it also inscribes *above and beyond* that movement the very movement and structure of the fan-as-text, the deployment and retraction of all its valences; the spacing, fold, and hymen *between* all these meaning-effects, with writing setting them up in relations of difference and resemblance. This surplus mark, this margin of meaning, is not one valence among others in the series, even though it is *inserted* in

there, too. It has to be inserted there to the extent that it does not exist outside the text and has no transcendental privilege; this is why it is always *represented* by a metaphor and a metonymy (page, plume, pleat). But while belonging in the series of valences, it always occupies the position of a supplementary valence, or rather, it marks the structurally necessary position of a supplementary inscription that could always be added to or subtracted from the series. We will try to show that this position of the supplementary mark is in all rigor neither a metaphor nor a metonymy even though it is always represented by one trope too many or too few.

Let us set the fan down here as an epigraph at the edge of the demonstration.

The "blank" appears first of all, to a phenomenological or thematic reading, as the inexhaustible totality of the semantic valences that have any tropic affinity with it (but what is "it"?). But, through a reduplication that is always represented, the "blank" *inserts* (says, designates, marks, states—however one wishes to put it, and there is a need here for a different "word") the blank as a blank *between* the valences, a hymen that unites and differentiates them in the series, the spacing of "the blanks" which "assume importance." Hence, the blank or the whiteness (is) the totality, however infinite, of the polysemic series, *plus* the carefully spaced-out splitting of the whole, the fanlike form of the text. This *plus* is not just one extra valence, a meaning that might enrich the polysemic series. And since it has no meaning, it is not *The* blank proper, the transcendental origin of the series. This is why, while it cannot constitute a meaning that is signified or represented, one would say in classical discourse that it always has a delegate or representative in the series: since the blank is the polysemic totality of everything white or blank *plus* the writing site (hymen, spacing, etc.) where such a totality is produced, this *plus* will, for example, find one of these representatives representing nothing in the blankness or margins of the page. But for the reasons just enumerated, it is out of the question that we should erect such a representative—for example the whiteness of the page of writing—into the fundamental signified or signifier in the series. Every signifier in the series is folded along the angle of this remark. The signifiers "writing," "hymen," "fold," "tissue," "text," etc., do not escape this common law, and only a conceptual strategy of some sort can temporarily privilege them as *determinate* signifiers or even as *signifiers* at all, which strictly speaking they *no longer are*.

This non-sense or non-theme of the spacing that relates the different meanings to each other (the meaning of "blank" or "white" along with the others) and in the process prevents them from ever meeting up with each



other cannot be accounted for by any *description*. It follows, then, firstly, that there is no such thing as description, particularly in Mallarmé's work: we have already shown through one or two examples that while Mallarmé was pretending to describe "something," he was *in addition* describing the operation of writing ("there is at Versailles a kind of wainscoting in scrollwork tracery . . ."). It follows, secondly, that any description of "themes," particularly in Mallarmé's work, will always run aground at the edges of this *greater* or *lesser* extent of theme which makes it possible that "there is" a text, that is, a readability without a signified (which will be decreed to be an unreadability by the reflexes of fright): an undesirable that throws desire back upon itself.

If polysemy is infinite, if it cannot be mastered as such, this is thus not because a finite reading or a finite writing remains incapable of exhausting a superabundance of meaning. Not, that is, unless one displaces the philosophical concept of finitude and reconstitutes it according to the law and structure of the text: according as the blank, like the hymen, re-marks itself forever as disappearance, erasure, non-sense. Finitude then becomes infinitude, according to a non-Hegelian identity: through an interruption that suspends the equation between the mark and the meaning, the "blank" marks everything white (this above all): virginity, frigidity, snow, sails, swans' wings, foam, paper, etc., *plus* the blankness that allows for the mark in the first place, guaranteeing its space of reception and production. This "last" blank (one could equally well say this "first" blank) comes neither before nor after the series. One can just as easily subtract it from the series (in which case it is determined as a lack to be silently passed over) or add it as an extra to the number, even if the number is infinite, of the valences of "white," either as an accidental bit of white, an inconsistent discard whose "consistency" will show up better later, or else as another theme which the open series must liberally embrace, or else, finally, as the transcendental space of inscription itself. As they play within this differential-supplementary structure, all the marks must blend to it, taking on the fold of this blank. The blank is folded, is (marked by) a fold. It never exposes itself to straight stitching. For the fold is no more of a theme (a signified) than the blank, and if one takes into account the linkages and rifts they propagate in the text, then *nothing* can simply have the value of a theme any more.

And there is more. The supplementary "blank" does not intervene only in the polysemous series of "white things," but also *between* the semes of *any* series and *between all* the semantic series in general. It therefore prevents any semantic seriality from being constituted, from being simply opened or

closed. Not that it acts as an obstacle: it is again the blank that actually liberates the effect that a series exists; in marking itself out, it *makes us take* agglomerates for substances. If thematicism cannot account for this, it is because it overestimates the *word* while restricting the *lateral*.

In his taxonomy of "whites," Richard indeed distinguished the *principal* valences, which he designated by abstract concepts or names of general essences ("the ecstasy of virginity, the pain of an obstacle or of frigidity, the happiness of an opening, of a liberation, of a meditation"), and the *lateral* valences exemplified by material things, enabling one to "move from the azure to the windowpane, to the blank paper, to the glacier, to the snowy peak, to the swan, to the wing, to the ceiling, not forgetting the lateral branchings . . . from the glacier to the melted water, to the blue eyes and to the amorous bath; from the white paper to the black marks that cover and divide it; from the ceiling to the tomb, the priest, the sylph, and the mandolin"). This leads one to believe that some sort of hierarchy lines the lateral themes up with the principal themes and that the former are but the sensible figures (metaphors or metonymies) of the latter, which one could *properly conceive* in their literal meaning. But without even resorting to the general law of textual supplementarity through which all proper meanings are dislocated, one has only to turn to one of Richard's own lateral remarks ("In fact it is actually the multiplicity of lateral relations that creates the *essence* of meaning," [p. 28n]) in order to undercut such a hierarchy. And since there is never, textually, anything but a silhouette, one can hold up against any frontal conception of the theme the way in which Mallarmé writes *on the bias*, his *double play* ceaselessly re-marking its *bifax*. Once more: ". . . it will be (the) language whose gambol this is.

"Words, of themselves, are exalted on many a facet known as the rarest or having value for the mind, the center of vibratory suspense; whoever perceives them independently from the ordinary sequence, projected, on the walls of a cave, as long as their mobility or principle lasts, being that which of discourse is not said: all of them quick, before becoming extinct or extinguished, to enter into a reciprocity of fires that is distant or presented on the bias as some contingency.

"The debate—which the average necessary obviousness deflects into a detail, remains one for grammarians." Elsewhere translated as "there is a double-faced silence" (p. 210).

The grammar of the *bias* and of *contingency* is not only concerned with treating lateral associations of themes or semes whose constituted, smoothed, and polished unit would have as its signifier the form of a word. And in fact, the "relation of affinity" which interests the thematic critic

only brings together semes whose signifying face always has the dimensions of a word or group of words related by their meaning (or signified concept). Thematicism necessarily leaves out of account the formal, phonic, or graphic "affinities" that do not have the shape of a word, the calm unity of the verbal sign. Thematicism as such necessarily ignores the play that takes the word apart, cutting it up and putting the pieces to work "on the bias as some contingency." It is certain that Mallarmé was fascinated by the possibilities inherent in the *word*, and Richard is right in emphasizing this (p. 528), but these possibilities are not primarily nor exclusively those of a body proper, a carnal unit, "the living creature" (p. 529) that miraculously unites sense and the senses into one *vox*; it is a play of articulations splitting up that body or reinscribing it within sequences it can no longer control. That is why we would not say of the word that it has "a *life* of its own" (ibid.); and Mallarmé was just as interested in the dissection of the word as in the integrity of its life proper. It is a dissection called for by the consonant as much as by the vowel, the pure vocable; called for no less by the differential skeleton than by the fullness of breath. On the table or on the page, Mallarmé treats the word as something dead *just as much as* something living. And how is one to separate what he says of the science of language in *Les Mots anglais* [*English Words*] from what he *does* elsewhere:

"Words, in the dictionary, are deposited, the same or of diverse date, like stratifications: in a moment I will speak of layers. . . . Akin to all of nature and hence comparable to the organism that stands as the depository of life, the Word presents, in its vowels and diphthongs, something like flesh; and, in its consonants, something like a skeleton delicate to dissect. Etc., etc., etc. If life feeds on its own past, or on a continual death, Science will uncover this fact in language: which latter, distinguishing man from the rest of things, will also imitate him in being factitious in essence no less than natural; reflective, than fated; voluntary, than blind" (p. 901).

This is why it is difficult to subscribe to the commentary Richard offers on the sentence from *Les Mots anglais* ("the Word presents . . . to dissect") at the very moment he recognizes that thematicism stops short before Mallarmé's formal analyses, here his work with phonetics: "If one wishes to know completely the profound orientation of a poet, one must perhaps attempt a phonetic phenomenology of his key words. In the absence of such a study, let us at least recognize in the word the mystery of the flesh joined with the felicity of structure: a union that suffices to make the word a complete, closed system, a microcosm" (p. 529). It is difficult to subscribe to this: (1) because such a phonetic phenomenology would always, as such, have to lead back to plenitudes or intuitive presences rather than to phonic

differences; (2) because the word cannot be a complete system or a body proper; (3) because, as we have tried to show, there cannot be any such thing as key words; (4) because Mallarmé's text works with graphic differences (in the narrowest ordinary sense of the term) as much as with phonic differences.

While it is far from being the only example, the play of *rhyme* is doubtless one of the most remarkable instances of this production of a new sign, a meaning and a form, through the "two-by-two" (cf. Richard, *passim*) and the magnetization of two signifiers; it is a production and a magnetization whose necessity imposes itself against contingency, arbitrariness, and semantic, or rather semiological, haphazardness. This is the operation of verse, whose concept Mallarmé, as we shall see, extends and generalizes; it is *not limited to rhyme* ("Verse, which, out of several vocables, remakes a total new word foreign to the language and as if incantatory, achieves that isolation of speech: negating, in a sovereign stroke, the haphazardness remaining in each term despite the artifice of its alternate retempering in sense and sound . . ." [p. 858]). Mallarmé's bias is also worked out with a file [*à la lime*; rhymes with *à la rime*, "at the rhyme"].<sup>54</sup> The "total new word foreign to the language": through this (signifying) difference, it is truly the effect of a transformation or displacement of the code, of the existing taxonomy ("new, foreign to the language"); and it is also, in its newness, its otherness, constituted out of parts borrowed from the language (the "old" language), to which, however, it cannot be reduced ("total"). But no astonishment at this poetic production of new meaning should make us forget—and to read Mallarmé is to be sufficiently reminded of it—that while it works *upon* the language, the total new word foreign to the language also *returns* to the language, recomposes with it according to new networks of differences, becomes divided up again, etc., in short, does not become a master-word with the finally guaranteed integrity of a meaning or truth.<sup>55</sup> The "effect" (in the Mallarméan sense of the word: "to paint not the

54. "*Lime*: from Lat. *lima*, related to *limus*, oblique, because of the obliquity or curvature of the teeth of a file" (Littré, from whom we are asking for anything but an etymology here).

55. This at least is the hypothesis on the basis of which we would question certain formulations in the remarkable analyses Richard entitles *Formes et moyens de la littérature* [*The Forms and Means of Literature*] (chap. 10). Formulations like these, for example, concerning the "new word": "this word is new because it is total, and it seems foreign to our language because it has been restored to that primordial language of which ours is but a fallen echo. . . . New, that which is of the order of the recreated original, that is, no doubt, of the eternal" (p. 537). "The pessimism of the word thus gives way in Mallarmé to a marvelous optimism of verse or sentence, which indeed is but a kind of confidence in the inventive or redemptive powers of the mind" (p. 544). "What pours forth here in the form of flowing fabric or a half-open spiritual strongbox is indeed the certain revelation of meaning" (p. 546).

thing but the effect it produces")<sup>6</sup> of totality or novelty does not make the word immune to difference or to the supplement; the word is not exempt from the law of the bias and does not present itself to us squarely, with its own singular face.

In the constellation of "blanks," the place of the semic content remains practically empty: it is that of the "blank" meaning insofar as it refers to the non-sense of spacing, the place where nothing takes place but the place. But that "place" is everywhere; it is not a site fixed and predetermined; not only, as we have already noted, because the signifying spacings continually reproduce themselves ("Indefectibly the white blank returns") but because the semic, metaphoric, or even thematic affinity between "white" [*blanc*] and "blank" [*blank*] (spacing, interval, the *entre*, etc.) means that each

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Since the value of virginity (newness, wholeness, etc.) is always overlaid with its opposite, it must ceaselessly be subjected—and would indeed submit of its own accord—to the operation of the hymen. The "presence" of words like "wholeness," "nativeness," "ingenuousness," etc., in Mallarmé's text cannot be *read* as a simple or simply positive valorization. All evaluations (optimism/pessimism) immediately pass into their opposite according to a logic that Richard describes elsewhere in its greatest complexity—at least up until the moment when, by a regularly repeated decision, what is undecidable or unprecedented in this logic, in this "almost impracticable" (p. 552) poetics, is reconstituted as a dialectical contradiction that must be gone beyond (p. 566), that Mallarmé would have wished to overcome through "a perfect synthetic form" (The Book) (p. 567); through the affirmation, produced by the space of its own absence, of a center of truth; through an aspiration toward unity, truth, "the happiness of a truth that is both active and closed" (p. 573), etc.

56. From a letter to Cazalis (1864, *Correspondance*, p. 137): ("I have finally begun my *Hérodiade*—in terror, for I am inventing a language that must necessarily arise from a highly new poetics, which I could define in the following two words: *To pains, not the thing, but the effect it produces*. The line of verse should not then be composed of words but of intentions, and all speech should efface itself before sensation." At that date, the first interpretation of the "highly new poetics" is formulated in a language that is naïvely sensualist and subjectivist. But the exclusion is clear: poetic language will not be a description or imitation or representation of the thing itself, of some substantial referent or of some primal cause, and it should not be *composed* of words taken as substantial or atomic units that are precisely undecomposable or uncompoundable. This letter (which should of course be interpreted with the utmost caution, without falling into retrospective teleology, etc.) seems at any rate to proscribe, under the terms of this new poetics, that a thing or cause in the last instance be what is signified by a text. ("There is no such thing as the true meaning of a text," said Valéry; of Mallarmé, he wrote: "But what one finds pronounced there on the contrary is the most daring and sustained attempt ever made to overcome what I shall call naive intuition in literature.") But it could be asked whether "sensation" or "intention" are not here simply occupying the place vacated by the referent, and are now to be *expressed* rather than *described*. This is no doubt the case, except if, in being placed in radical opposition to *the thing* with all its predicates, which is what Mallarmé is doing, they are in effect being displaced otherwise by a discourse, a practice, a writing.

Like almost all the texts I cite (and this is why I do not mention it each time), this letter is given a different commentary by Richard (p. 541).

"white" in the series, each "full" white thing in the series (snow, swan, paper, virginity, etc.), is the trope of the "empty" white space. And vice versa. The dissemination of the whites (*not* the dissemination of whiteness) produces a tropological structure that circulates infinitely around itself through the incessant supplement of an extra turn: there is *more* metaphor, *more* metonymy. Since everything becomes metaphorical, there is no longer any literal meaning and, hence, no longer any metaphor either. Since everything becomes metonymical, the part being each time greater than the whole and the whole smaller than the part, how could one arrest a metonymy or a synecdoche? How could one fix the *margins* of any rhetoric?

If there is no such thing as a total or proper meaning, it is because the blank *folds over*. The fold is not an accident that happens to the blank. From the moment the blank (is) white or bleaches (itself) out, as soon as there is something (there) to see (or not to see) having to do with a *mark* (which is the same word as *margin* or *march*), whether the white is marked (snow, swan, virginity, paper, etc.) or unmarked, merely demarcated (the *entre*, the void, the blank, the space, etc.), it re-marks itself, marks itself twice. It folds itself around this strange limit. The fold does not come up upon it from outside; it is the blank's outside as well as its inside, the complication according to which the supplementary mark of the blank (the asemic spacing) applies itself to the set of white things (the full semic entities), plus to itself, the fold of the veil, tissue, or text upon itself. By reason of this application that nothing has preceded, there will never be any Blank with a capital B or any theology of the Text.<sup>57</sup> And yet the structural site of this theological trap is nevertheless prescribed: the mark-supplement [*le supplément de marque*] produced by the text's workings, in falling outside of the text like an independent object with no origin other than itself, a trace that turns back into a presence (or a sign), is inseparable from desire (the desire for reappropriation or representation). Or rather, it gives birth to it and nourishes it in the very act of separating from it.

The fold folds (itself): its meaning spaces itself out with a double mark, in the hollow of which a blank is folded. [The fold is simultaneously

57. If the *blanc* extends both the marks and the margins of the text, then there is no reason to give any special status to the whiteness of what we think we know literally under the name *page* or *paper*. The occurrences of this type of white are less numerous (examples are found in *Mimique* and *Deuil* and on pp. 38, 523, 872, 900, etc.) than others, the white of all the fabrics, the flying wings or foam, the sobs, fountains, flowers, women, or nudes in the night, the agonies, etc. The white involved in spacing slips in between all the others and can be remarked in the word *spacious*, whether it intervenes directly ("what leaps and if more spacious . . ." p. 312; "here the spacious illusion intervenes," p. 414; cf. also pp. 371, 404, 649, 859, 860, 868, etc.), or figuratively.

virginity, what violates virginity, and the fold which, being neither one nor the other and both at once, undecidable, *remains* as a text, irreducible to either of its two senses. "The act of folding . . . with respect to the page printed large," the "intervention of folding or *rhythm*, that which initially causes a closed page to contain a secret; silence remains in it," "the folding back of the paper and the undersides this installs, the shadow dispersed in the black lettering" (p. 379), "the virginal folding back of the book" (p. 381),<sup>58</sup> such is the closed, feminine form of the book, protective of the secret of its hymen, the "frail inviolability" preceding "the introduction of a weapon, or letter opener, to mark the taking of possession," before "the consummation of any encroachment." We have never been so close to *Mimique*, and the femininity of the virgin book is surely suggested by the place and form of the verb "prête" [as a verb, it means "lends," as an adjective, it means "ready" or "willing" in the feminine.—Trans.], clearly ready to offer itself as an adjective with the copula understood ("The virginal folding-back of the book, again, willing/lends for a sacrifice from which the red edges of the books of old once bled"). The masculine is turned back upon the feminine: the whole adventure of sexual difference. The secret angle of the fold is also that of a "minuscule tomb."

But in the same blow, so to speak, the fold ruptures the virginity it marks as virginity. Folding itself over its secret (and nothing is more virginal and at the same time more purloined and penetrated, already in and of itself, than a secret), it loses the smooth simplicity of its surface. It differs from itself, even *before* the letter opener can separate the lips of the book.<sup>59</sup> It is divided from and by itself, like the hymen. But after the fact, it still remains what it was, a virgin, beforehand, faced with the brandished knife ("the fact is, in the actual case, that, for my part, however, on the subject of pamphlets to be read according to common usage, I brandish a knife, like a cook slaughtering fowls"). After the consummation, more folded up than ever, the virginity transforms the act that has been perpetrated into a simulation, a "barbarous simulacrum." What is intact is remarked by the mark that remains intact, an immarcescible text, at the very edge of the margin: "The folds will perpetuate a mark, intact, bidding one to open or close the page, according to the master" (p. 381).

58. Emphasis mine. "Yes, the Book or that monograph it becomes of a type (the superimposition of pages as in a jewel case, defending an infinite, intimate, tucked-in delicacy of (the) being in itself against brutal space) is sufficient with many a truly new procedure analogous in rarefaction to the subtlest features of life" (p. 318).

59. On the (anagrammatic, hymenographic) play between *livre* [book] and *lèvres* [lips], read over the development opened up in *Crayonné au théâtre* on the House, the Stage, and the "absent mime" (pp. 334–35).

Perpetual, the rape has always already taken place and will *nevertheless* never have been perpetrated. For it will always have been caught in the foldings of some veil, where any and all truth comes undone.

Indeed: if all the "whites" accrue to themselves the blanks that stand for the spacing of writing—the "blanks" that assume importance—it is always by way of a signifying relay through the white canvas or sail, a cloth that is folded and stitched, the surface on which all marks apply themselves, the sheet of paper where the pen or the wing comes to propagate itself ("Our triumphal frolic, so old, out of the crypt-book / Hieroglyphics that so exalt the multitudes / Propagating with the wing a familiar shiver!" [p. 71]).<sup>60</sup> The blanks are always applied, directly or indirectly, to something woven: whether it be "the white solicitude of our canvas" (*Salut*), "the banal whiteness of the curtains" (*Les Fenêtres*), the white in the *Albums* (where "white reflection" rhymes with "simulation") or in the *fan* poems (" . . . wool / . . . white flock"), the white of the bed sheet or the pall, the shroud (extending through a number of texts *between* the "sole fold" in the *Homage* to Wagner and the vellum in the *Overture to Hérodiade* ("She sang out, sometimes incoherently, a lamentable / Sign! the bed with the vellum pages, / Such, useless and so cloistral, is no linen! / Which no longer keeps the cryptic folds of dreams, / Nor the sepulchral canopy's deserted moire")) in which the book is wound ("The lovely paper of my ghost / Together sepulcher and shroud / Thrills with immortality, a tome / To be unfurled for one alone" (p. 179)) or in which the Poet is draped ("The flash of a sword, or, white dreamer, he wears a cope, . . . Dante, in bitter laurel, in a shroud is draped, / A shroud . . ." (p. 21)), icy like the paper, or frigid (which rhymes, in one dedication, with "Gide": "Awaiting what he himself will add / You sheets of paper now so frigid, / Exalt me as a great musician / For the attentive soul of Gide" (p. 151)). These veils, sails, canvases, sheets, and pages are at once the content and the form, the ground and the figure, passing alternately from one to the other. Sometimes the example is a figure for the white space on which they are inscribed, that which stands out, and sometimes it is the infinite background behind. White on white. The blank is colored by a supplementary white, an extra blank that becomes, as in *Numbers*, a blank open on all four sides, a blank that is written, blackens itself of its own accord, a false true blank sense [*sens blanc*], without a blank [*sans blanc*], no longer countable or totalizable, counting on and discounting itself at once, a blank that indefinitely displaces the margin and undoes

60. "Sois, Louys, l'aile qui propages / A quelque altitude ces Pages" ["Louys, be the wing that propagates / To some altitude these Pages"] (p. 151).



what Richard calls "the unitary aspiration of meaning" (p. 542) or the "sure revelation of meaning" (p. 546). The white veil that slips between the blanks, the spacing that guarantees both the gap and the contact, enables us no doubt to see the blanks; it determines them. It could therefore never be lifted without blinding us to death, either by closing or by bursting. But inversely, if it were never lifted, if the hymen remained sealed, the eye would still have no greater capacity to open. The hymen, therefore, is not the truth of an unveiling. There is no *alētheia*, only a wink of the hymen. A rhythmic fall. A regular, (*w*)*inclined* cadence.

The dream of the "sure revelation of meaning" proposed to us by *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* thus appears to be a hymen without a fold, a pure unveiling without a snag, a "felicity of expression" and a marriage without difference. But in this wrinkle-free felicity, would there still be such a thing as an "expression," not to speak of a text? Would there be anything beyond a simple parousia of meaning? Not that, in the absence of such parousia, literature would be an infelicity of expression, a romantic inadequacy between expression and meaning. What is in question here is neither a felicity nor an infelicity of expression—because there is no longer any expression, at least in the ordinary sense of the word. No doubt the hymen, too, would be one of those "beneficent figures" engendered by "the opposition between the closed and the open," "in which both contradictory needs can be satisfied, successively or simultaneously: for example the *fan*, the *book*, the *dancer* . . ." (pp. 26–27). But such dialectical happiness will never account for a text. If there is text, if the hymen constitutes itself as a textual trace, if it always leaves something behind, it is because its undecidability cuts it off from (prevents it from depending on) every—and hence *any*—signified, whether antithetic or synthetic.<sup>61</sup> Its textuality would not be irreducible if, through the necessities of its functioning, it did not do without (deprivation and/or independence: the hymen is the structure of *and/or*, between *and* and *or*) its refill of signified, in the movement through which it leaps from one to another. Thus, strictly speaking, it is not a true sign or "signifier." And since everything that (becomes) traces owes this to the propagation-structure of the hymen, a text is never truly made up of "signs" or "signifiers." (This, of course, has not prevented us from using the word "signifier" for the sake of convenience, in order to designate, within

61. It would be useful to quote in their entirety—and perhaps discuss some of the speculative moments—the analyses put forth by R. G. Cohn concerning what he calls Mallarmé's "antithesis" and "dual-polarity" (*L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, pp. 41–42 and Appendix 1).

the former code, that facet of the trace that cuts itself off from meaning or from the signified.)

And now we must attempt to write the word *dissemination*.

And to explain, with Mallarmé's text, why one is always at some pains to follow.

If there is thus no thematic unity or overall meaning to reappropriate beyond the textual instances, no total message located in some imaginary order, intentionality, or lived experience, then the text is no longer the expression or representation (felicitous or otherwise) of any *truth* that would come to diffract or assemble itself in the polysemy of literature. It is this hermeneutic concept of *polysemy* that must be replaced by *dissemination*.

According to the structure of supplementarity, what is added is thus always a blank or a fold: the fact of addition gives way to a kind of multiple division or subtraction that enriches itself with zeros as it races breathlessly toward the infinite. "More" and "less" are only separated/united by the infinitesimal inconsistency, the next-to-nothing of the hymen. This play of the integral unit excrescent with zeros, "sums, by the hundreds and beyond," is demonstrated by Mallarmé under the title of *Or* [this word is both a noun signifying "Gold" and a conjunction marking a turning point in an argument.—Trans.] (expert as he was in alloying—in the literal alchemy of such an ironic, precious, and overinflated signifier—the sensible, phonetic, graphic, economic, logical, and syntactical virtues of this stone in which the "two ways, in all, in which our need is bifurcated: esthetics on the one hand and also political economy" intersect (p. 399; cf. also p. 656)):

"OR

. . . The currency, that engine of terrible precision, clean to the conscience, smooth to consciousness, loses even a meaning.

. . . a notion of what sums, by the hundreds and beyond, can be. . . The inability of numbers, whatever their grandiloquence, to translate, here arises from a case; one searches, with the indication that, when a number is raised and goes out of reach toward the improbable, it inscribes more and more zeros: signifying that its total is spiritually equivalent to nothing, almost."<sup>62</sup>

62. OR, which is condensed or coined without counting in the illumination of a page. The signifier OR (O + R) is distributed there, blazing, in disks of all sizes: "outdoORs" [*debORs*], "fantasmagORical," "stORe" [*srésOR*], "hORizon," "mORe" [*majORe*], "exteriOR" [*bORs*], not counting the O's, the zeROs, the null opposite of OR, the number of round, regular numerals lined up "toward the improbable." Referring by simulacrum to a fact—everything seems to turn around the Panama scandal ("Those are the facts," affirms the first version, which has not yet erased its referent, "the collapse of Panama." I will study elsewhere the textual operations involved here)—this page, less than thirty-two lines, seems

at least to retain gold as its principal signified, its general theme. *Or*, through a clever exchange, it is rather the signifier that this page treats, the signifier in the full range of its registers, whose orchestration Mallarmé illustrates here and elsewhere. For even the theme, were it present as such, is but another addition to the order of the signifier: not the metallic substance, the thing itself involved in "phraseless gold," but the metal as a monetary sign, the "currency," "signifying that its total is spiritually equivalent to nothing, almost," and which "loses even a meaning" (p. 398).

The whole is mounted in a picture frame, the semblance of a description, a fictive landscape of "fantasmagorical sunsets" whose play of lights would already, indefinitely, arrest the eye on the shadow of its ores. Such "avalanches of gold" (p. 33) methodically defy any phenomenology, any semantics, any psychoanalysis of the material imagination. They systematically outwit and undo the oppositions between the syntactic and the semantic, between form and content, ground and figure, figural and literal, metaphor and metonymy. The demonstration must be announced under the title of *khrysis* and threads (sons) of gold.

*Or*, *Igitur's* ascendancy comes, logically, *before* the consequence [*Igitur* in Latin means "therefore"; thus this adverb-name has grammatical affinities with *or*.—Trans.], but it also, through its etymological ascendants, marks the *hour* (*bora*, which would give a reading not only of all the "hours" and "ors" in *Igitur* but also of all Mallarmé's *encor(es)*, whether or not they rhyme with *or*: *hanc boram*): ". . . an eclipse: *or*, the hour has come, for here is Pierrot . . ." (p. 751). *Or*, that substantive noun, that adverb of time [*or* also, archaically, means "today," "presently."—Trans.], that logical conjunction, a veritable throw of linguistic dice—Mallarmé's syntax organizes not only its polysemy, its polygraphy, and its orchestral polyphony, but also, most particularly, its out-of-line ex-centricity and its brilliant suspension. I have chosen three examples among many. From the first version: "*or*, because he would not understand, it will be deferred forever." From *Crayonné au théâtre*: "Moved to pity, the perpetual suspense of a tear that can never be entirely formed nor fall (still the lustre) scintillates in a thousand glances, *or*, an ambiguous smile unpurses the lip . . . throughout the labyrinth of anxiety led by art—really not in order to let myself be overcome as if my fate were not enough, a spectator attending a gala; but in order to plunge, in some way, back into the populace . . ." (p. 296). From the *Quand au Livre* (the book being always, as we shall see in a moment, associated with gold): "*Or*—

"The act of folding is, with respect to the page printed large, an indication . . ." (p. 379).

The limits of thematism, as one could once again verify text in hand (I will not do so here), have never been so striking as in the case of "*or*," and not only because dissemination stands confirmed through the affinity between the seed sown and that very precious substance, because dispersal is goldenly consumed in the Book ("ashes-total-gold—" 32 [A]), but first and foremost because that signifier "loses even a meaning," becomes extenuated, devalued, mined out. Names no longer.

In another vein—to be looked into—*or* colors the bedtime hour of all sunsets, beside all of Mallarmé's "beds"; he also plays on all its tunes: "the golden hues of sundown," from *Petit Air*, ". . . a gold / Is dying according perhaps to the *decor* / Of unicorns . . . / . . . once more . . ." from the *Sonnet in —yx* (in which the folds of its rhyme alternate with those of the *ptyx*), the end of the "afternoons of music," "an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with thought and dusk . . ." from *Mimique*. At the end of the sun's course, after-noon, gold repeats and (re)doubles, after midnight, the horror and the aurora. It always serves as their rhyme (through rhythm or through number). "This gold moon-rise . . ." (p. 109) always serves as the closing for—a march. A book: "O golden clasps of olden missals! O hieroglyphs inviolate in papyrus scrolls!" (p. 257). A mine or a tomb: ". . . by the pearly star of their nebulous science held in one hand, and by the golden spark of their volume's heraldic clasp in the other; of the volume of their nights" (*Igitur*, p. 437).

*Or*—in its impurity—will never simply have been either the dense fullness of sensible matter (or even of music or rays of light, "shafts of vibratory gold," (p. 334)), nor the transparent alloy of a logical conjunction. Molten *or*. Golden time, neither sensible nor

intelligible, not even a sign, then, or a signifier or signified; at least as much "*Il Signor*," "*qui s'ignore*" ["who does not know himself"] (which, in the *Triolets*, rhymes with "*signe, or*" ["sign, gold"]) as it is a sign—or, this *or* is consistently mounted according to the double syntax of the goldsmith and the watchmaker, in the golden antre of a glottis (*glossa* can once have had the meaning *gold ingot*, and Littré notes that "the once-held etymology that derives *lingot* [ingot] from the Latin *lingua*, because of its form, still remains possible"). Hearing, seeing, reading: "A hundred posters soaking up the uncomprehended gold of days, a betrayal of the letter . . ." (p. 288).

Has it ever been noted ("buried / Endlessly in blinding scholarly abysses / Unknown gold . . ." p. 470) that the first paragraph of *Igitur* (*the Midnight*) links the words "hour," "*or*," and "gold work," and rereads "the infinite accident of conjunctions"? "Certainly there subsists a Midnight presence. The hour has not disappeared through a mirror, nor has it buried itself in drapes, evoking furniture through its vacant sonority. I remember that its gold [*son or*] was about to feign in absence some null jewel of reverie, something rich and useless that had survived, unless it was that upon the watery and starty complexiry of a work of gold the infinite accident of conjunctions could be read.

"This revealer of the Midnight has never before indicated such a conjuncture, for this is the one unique hour . . . I was the hour that has to make me pure."

"*Son or*" follows right after "vacant sonority." "*Or*" is more than once preceded by the possessive adjective *son* [his, her, its]: which in effect gives us *sonore* ["sonorous"], and which, through an unconscious lateral pressure, transforms the possessive adjective into a noun, *le SON or* ["the sound, 'or' "] and the noun into an adjective, *le son OR* ["the sound or"].

The "sound *or*" re-marks the signifier *or* (the phonic signifier: of the conjunction or of the noun, which latter is also the signifier of the substance or of the metallic signifier, etc.), but it also re-marks music. Which is to be expected since music, for Mallarmé, is almost always golden, while *or* is reduced by this play to the vacant sonority—with its chance decor—of a signifier. Thus: "On the credenzas, in the empty parlor: no pryx, / Abolished bauble of sonorous inaniry, / (For the Master has gone to fetch tears from the Styx / With that object alone that is the pride of Nothingness [*dont le Néant s'honore*]) / But near the casement vacant to the north, a gold / Is dying according perhaps to the decor / Of unicorns . . .," or *Mimique* again: ". . . an orchestra only marking with its gold [*son or*], its brushes with thought and dusk, the detail of its signification on a par with a stilled ode . . ."

One can also bring in the diverse *or*'s from the text on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: the "gold shield" and the "thread of gold" are spread out under the "heraldic sunset," and strange conjunctions overlay the "jewelry": "*or* such a childlike and powerful amalgam . . ." (p. 483), "*or* here it is, so overwritten it has become a palimpsest, or, I have to say, excessive wear has obliterated the tenor, so that it does not present anything decipherable" (p. 486, cf, also pp. 497–500). In the same vein, in the *Chevelure*, which announces the "jewel of the eye" and the "exploit / Of sowing rubies": "But without *or* sighing that this lively cloud . . ." (p. 53). How could the categories of classical rhetoric possibly account for such displacements? [Not to speak of the categories of translation.—Trans.]

Corresponding to the Oedipal hymen, to the "infinite accident of conjunctions" and of the "conjuncture" in *Igitur*'s *or*, there is "that supreme conjunction with probability" in the SI ["if," "whether," "yes"] or the *Comme SI* ["as IF"] in the *Coup de dés*. Hence—if, in one fell swoop, the plays of *Or* and *Donc* are constellated with the powerful positioning of the Mallarméan SI, an infinite sentence unfolds, suspending itself among SI, OR, DONC, in which the order can as well be reversed from *Igitur* to the *Coup de dés*. (Can one then conclude, as does J. Scherer (in the course of a chapter of his thesis devoted to *The Conjunction* in which none of these three "words" are named) that "conjunctions seldom attract his [Mallarmé's] attention", (p. 127) or "play a role of little importance" (pp. 287)?)

*Or*—that singular plural, such is the ring of hour and species set in the balance of Mallarmé.

Why does this almost-nothing lose the glint of a phenomenon? Why is there no phenomenology of the hymen? Because the antre in which it folds back, as little in order to conceal itself as in order to denude itself, is also an abyss. In the recoiling of the blank upon the blank, the blank colors itself, becomes—for itself, of itself, affecting itself ad infinitum—its own colorless, ever more invisible, ground. Not that it is out of reach, like the phenomenological horizon of perception, but that, in the act of inscribing itself on itself indefinitely, mark upon mark, it multiplies and complicates its text, a text within a text, a margin in a mark, the one indefinitely repeated within the other: an abyss.

Now {Or}, isn't it precisely such writing *en abyme*<sup>63</sup> that thematic criticism—and no doubt criticism as such—can never, to the letter, account for? The abyss will never have the glint of a phenomenon because it becomes black. Or white. The one and/or the other in the squaring of writing. It whitens (itself) in the incline of *A Throw of Dice*.

EVEN WHEN TOSSED UNDER  
 ETERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES  
 FROM THE DEPTHS OF A SHIPWRECK  
 WHETHER  
     the Abyss  
 whitened  
     spreads out  
     furious  
         under an incline  
             hovers desperately  
                 on the wing  
                     its own  
                         in  
  
 advance fallen in its pains to straighten its flight  
                     and covering the upbursting swell  
                         leveling off the surging leaps

63. TN. The expression *en abyme*, popularized by Gide, was originally used in heraldry to designate the status of the figure of a small shield used to decorate a shield. Now used whenever some part of a whole can be seen as a representation of that whole, often ad infinitum, as in the Quaker Oats box on which a man holds up a Quaker Oats box on which a man . . . etc.

very inwardly sums up  
 the shadow buried in the deeps by this alternative sail  
     to the point of adapting  
     to the span  
 its gaping depth as the hull  
     of a structure  
 listing to one or the other side...

Thus reconstituted in each of its stitches, the hymen still echoes from every side. Reflecting, for example, *A la nue accablante tu* (*To the crushing nude cloud silenced*). If one repeats a fragment here and there, hearing what resonates from one side to the other, counting the A's, as white as foam, here perhaps is what the hymen will always have disseminated ("tossed under..."): SPERM, the burning lava, milk, spume, froth, or dribble of the seminal liquor. I shall now underline a number of letters, reserving the A's and the *Tu*'s, along with the sonnet's form, for some future reading:

To the crushing nude cloud silenced  
 Basalt base of bass and *lava*  
*Even through the slavish echoes*  
 By a *trumpeting sans virtue*

What *sepulchral shipwreck* (you do  
 Know it, *spummy* depths, but *drivel*)  
 One supreme *between* the flotsam  
 Can *abolish* the bare masthead

Or this that in (de)fault *furious*  
 Of some sort of *high perdition*  
 All the *vain abyss unfolded*

In the hair *so white* that straggles  
 Avariciously will *drown* the  
*Childlike haunches* of a *siren*.<sup>64</sup>

64. TN. The original French text with Derrida's emphasis is:

A LA NUE accablante tu  
 Basse de basalte et de *laves*  
 A même les *échos* esclaves  
 Par une *trompe* sans vertu  
  
 Quel *sépulcral naufrage* (tu  
 Le sais, *écume*, mais y *baves*)  
 Suprême *une entre* les épaves  
 Abolit le *mât dévêtu*

While it is not exhausted by it, no more than is the affirmation of any text, this sonnet articulates both the scenography and the syllabary of the double session. Which is condensed there, and indefinitely displaced, much more than is required by the efforts of any "commentary." Dissemination skims and froths the flight and theft of the seminal: a vain, blank loss in a wet dream in which the masthead, *pour qui le lit* [for the one that reads / for which the bed exists], blots itself into abysses of lost veils, sails, and children. A « *bo / lit*.<sup>65</sup> The "so white."

In a demonstration that leaves no room for doubt, Robert Greer Cohn has reconstituted the links in the chain that unites the white with the seminal, both through direct attribution and through the semic constellation of milk, sap, stars [*étoiles*] (which so often rhyme with *sail / veil* [voile]) or through the milky way that inundates Mallarmé's "corpus."<sup>66</sup> And let us reread once more: "to seek support, according to the page, upon the blank space, which inaugurates it . . . for an ingenuousness . . . and, when, in a break—the slightest, disseminated—chance is aligned, conquered word by word, indefectibly the white blank returns. . . . Virginity . . . divided into its fragments of candor, the one and the other, nuptial proofs of the Idea" (p. 387). And reread the letter to Cazalis (1864): ". . . terror, for I am inventing a language that must necessarily arise from an extremely new poetics" but then further on: "I would never touch my quill again if I were flooded. . . . Alas! the baby is going to interrupt me. I've already been interrupted once by the presence of our friend—toward whom, even, the imp of perversity pushed me to act very bitter, I don't know why—. And then the weather is so sad and grey, a time when

*the drowned poet dreams of obscene lines.*

"I've even written some, but I won't send them to you, because the nightly emissions of a poet ought to be milky ways, and mine are just shameful stains."

Ou cela que *furibond faute*  
De quelque *perdition haute*  
Tout l'*abîme vain éployé*

Dans le *si blanc* cheveu qui traîne  
Avarement aura *noyé*  
Le *flanc enfant* d'une *sirène*

65. TN. *Abol/it*. The word *abolit* means "abolishes." A homonym would be *à beau lit*, ("with/to a beautiful bed"). A related expression would be (*il*) *a beau lire*, ("he reads in vain"). Again, a certain obliteration marks the bed and the page, sleeping and reading, copulation and interpretation.

66. See Cohn, *L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé*, esp. pp. 137–39.

And to Régnier, in September 1893, he writes: "I am also reworking my deepest stores and whitewashing, by drinking milk, my inmost cell."

Appearances to the contrary, the endless work of condensation and displacement does not end up leading us to dissemination as its ultimate meaning or primary truth. The emission here is not that of a message: Mallarmé's *dispersal*. Following a pattern we have already experienced in the "entre," the quasi-"meaning" of dissemination is the impossible return to the rejoined, readjusted unity of meaning, the impeded march of any such reflection. But is dissemination then the *loss* of that kind of truth, the *negative* prohibition of all access to such a signified? Far from presupposing that a virgin substance thus precedes or oversees it, dispersing or withholding itself in a negative second moment, dissemination *affirms* the always already divided generation of meaning.<sup>67</sup> Dissemination—spills it in advance.

67. No more than can castration, dissemination—which entails, entrains, "inscribes," and relaunched castration—can never become an originary, central, or ultimate signified, the place proper to truth. On the contrary, dissemination represents the affirmation of this nonorigin, the remarkable empty locus of a hundred blanks no meaning can be ascribed to, in which mark supplements and substitution games are multiplied *ad infinitum*. In *The Uncanny*, Freud—here more than ever attentive to undecidable ambivalence—to the play of the double, to the endless exchange between the fantastic and the real, the "symbolized" and the "symbolizer," to the process of interminable substitution—can, without contradicting this play, have recourse both to castration anxiety, behind which no deeper secret (*kein tieferes Geheimnis*), no other meaning (*keine andere Bedeutung*) would lie hidden, and to the substitutive relation (*Ersatzbeziehung*) itself, for example between the eye and the male member. Castration is that nonsecret of seminal division that breaks into substitution.

It should not be forgotten that in *Das Unheimliche*, after having borrowed all his material from literature, Freud strangely sets aside the case of literary fictions that include supplementary resources of *Unheimlichkeit*: "Nearly all the instances which contradict our hypothesis are taken from the realm of fiction and literary productions. This may suggest a possible differentiation between the uncanny that is actually experienced (*das man erlebt*), and the uncanny as we merely picture it (*das man sich bloss vorstellt*) or read about it (*von dem man liest*)" [Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) p. 155] "The Uncanny as it is depicted in literature, in stories and imaginative productions (*Das Unheimliche der Fiktion—der Phantasie, der Dichtung—*) merits in truth a separate discussion" (p. 157). ". . . fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations than are possible in real life (*die Fiktion neue Möglichkeiten des unheimlichen Gefühls erschafft, die in Erleben wegfallen würden*). . . . It is clear that we have not exhausted the possibilities of poetic license and the privileges enjoyed by story-writers in evoking or in excluding an uncanny feeling" (p. 160). (To be continued)

"Appearing there then as half  
two halves of a troop"  
[17(A)]

"hemisphere  
—and the monster eye  
that looks at them—  
but something still they  
lack" [18(A)].



We will therefore not return to dissemination as if it were the center of the web. We return to it, rather, as to the fold of the hymen, to the somber white of the cave or of the womb, to the black-on-white upon the womb,<sup>68</sup> the locus of scattered emissions, of chances taken with no return, of separations. We will not follow up the "arachnoid thread."

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Like Mallarmé (pp. 308–82 and elsewhere), Freud encountered the riddle of the butterfly. Let us pin it down with a couple of indications, in order to be able to reread it later, perhaps. It is in *Wolf Man*: "His fear of the butterfly was in every respect analogous to his fear of the wolf; in both cases it was a fear of castration. . . . He was also informed that when he himself was three months old he had been so seriously ill . . . that his winding-sheet had been got ready for him. . . . The world, he said, was hidden from him by a veil; and our psychoanalytic training forbids our assuming that these words can have been without significance or have been chosen at haphazard. The veil was torn, strange to say, in one situation only; and that was at the moment when, as a result of an enema, he passed a motion through his anus. He then felt well again, and for a very short while he saw the world clearly. The interpretation of this 'veil' progressed with as much difficulty as we met with in clearing up his *fear of the butterfly*. Nor did he keep to the veil. It evaporated into a sense of twilight, into '*ténèbres*,' and into other impalpable things. It was not until just before taking leave of the treatment that he remembered having been told that he was born with a caul. . . . Thus the caul was the veil which hid him from the world and hid the world from him. The complaint that he made was in reality a fulfilled wish-phantasy: it exhibited him as back once more in the womb. . . . But what can have been the meaning of the fact that this veil, which was now symbolic but had once been real, was torn at the moment at which he evacuated his bowels after an enema? . . . If this birth-veil was torn, then he saw the world and was re-born. . . . The necessary condition of his re-birth was that he should have an enema administered to him by a man. . . . Here, therefore, the phantasy of rebirth was simply a mutilated and censored version of the homosexual wish-phantasy. . . . The tearing of the veil was analogous to the opening of his eyes and to the opening of the window. . . . The wish to be born of his father . . . , the wish to present him with a child—and all this at the price of his own masculinity— . . . in them homosexuality has found its furthest and most intimate expression." And this note: "A possible subsidiary explanation, namely that the veil represented the hymen which is torn at the moment of intercourse with a man, does not harmonize completely with the necessary condition of his recovery. Moreover it has no bearing upon the life of the patient, for whom virginity carried no significance." (A rather strange remark, when we are talking of someone who wanted to "return to the womb," at least.) [Freud, *Three Case Studies*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 288–94.]

From the butterfly's wing to the hymen, via the head hooded with a caul. In the meantime, one can refer to the "veil of illusion" and the "hood" ["*coiffe*"] from the *Coup de dés*—and elsewhere—to the "hymen" from *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole* [*For Anatole's Tomb*] (ed. J. P. Richard, Paris: Seuil, 1961): to the son: "... to us / two, let us make / an alliance / a hymen, superb / — and the life / that remains in me / I will use it for— / no mother / then? ..." (leaves 39–40) "child, seed / idealization" (16) "the double side / man woman / — sometimes for / profound union / one, for the other, whence / and you the sister / " (56–57).

68. Follow for example the play of the "finger" (the die, *datum* or *digitum*) in the *Prose des fous* (Mysticis Umbraculis) which "trembled" next to the "navel," "and her flesh seemed like snow on which, / While a golden ray lit the forest, / The mossy nest of a gay goldfinch had fallen" (p. 22).

As soon as one has recognized, from all the disseminated webs, the fold of the hymen—with all that this supplement is henceforth woven of—one has read not only the “nubile folds” in the *Tombeau de Verlaine* but also the endless multiplication of folds, unfoldings, foldouts, foldures, folders, and manifolds, along with the plies, the ploys, and the multi-plications. Every determinate fold unfolds the figure of another (from the leaf to the sheet, from the sheet to the shroud, from the bed to the book, from the linen to the vellum, from the wing to the fan, from the veil to the dancer, to the plumes, to the leaflet, etc.) and of the re-mark of this fold-upon-itself of writing. It would be easy to verify the preceding demonstration for the polysemy of the fold: under the constraints of the differential-supplementary structure, which constantly adds or withdraws a fold from the series, no possible theme of the fold would be able to constitute the system of its meaning or present the unity of its multiplicity. If there were no fold, or if the fold had a limit somewhere—a limit other than itself as a mark, margin, or march (threshold, limit, or border)—there would be no text. But if the text does not, to the letter, exist, then *there is* perhaps a text. A text one must make tracks with.

If there were no text, there would perhaps be some unimaginable “felicity of expression,” but there would no doubt be no literature. If literature—the literature Mallarmé still produces under that name, allowing for the reservations set forth above concerning “literarity” (the essence or truth of literature)—is engaged in this fold of a fold, then it is not a mere subsection of foldedness: it can give its name to anything that resists, within a given history, the pure and simple abolishing of the fold. Anything that resists being used as an example:

The Mallarméan figure of the *fold*, for example, enables us to join the erotic to the sensible, then to the reflexive, to the metaphysical, and to the literary: the fold is at once sex, foliage, mirror, book, and tomb—all are realities it gathers up into a certain very special dream of intimacy. (Richard, p. 28)

But the fold is not a form of reflexivity. If by reflexivity one means the motion of consciousness or self-presence that plays such a determining role in Hegel’s speculative logic and dialectic, in the movement of sublation (*Aufhebung*) and negativity (the essence is reflection, says the greater *Logic*), then reflexivity is but an effect of the fold as text. In a chapter called *Reflexivity*, Richard analyzes the fold along the dialectical, totalizing, eudemonistic lines we have already questioned. He turns the fold, so to speak, only in the direction of the “very special dream of intimacy,” toward

the reserved, protected, "modest" insides of self-consciousness ("Conscious of itself, intimacy becomes reflexivity"):

To reflect intellectually is already to fold in upon oneself. . . The folding-back also protects a secret dimension of the object; it reserves an inside for being. . . . The fold is perfect then because intimacy can dwell there in both the security and the equality of the exact adequation of two *sames*, and in the shimmering, the active consciousness, born of the encounter between two *others*. Each self possesses itself in an other it nonetheless knows to be only another self. At the farthest reach of Herodiade's narcissism, and doubtless even more perfect than that because it would introduce into the reflexive circuit the exciting presence of pseudo-otherness, there exists perhaps in Mallarmé the temptation, entirely on the mental level, of what would elsewhere be called homosexuality. . . . Within the folded object—book, bed, wing—the intimate space annuls itself with so much intimacy: the self and its image are no longer separated, as in a mirror, by any distance. (Pp. 177–78)

Even supposing that the mirror does unite the self with its image, this analysis, while not in truth unjustifiable, deliberately and unilaterally closes the fold, interprets it as a coincidence with self, makes opening into the precondition of self-*adequation*, and reduces every way in which the fold also marks dehiscence, dissemination, spacing, temporization, etc. This confirms the classical reading of Mallarmé and confines his text within an atmosphere of intimism, symbolism, and neo-Hegelianism.

Dissemination in the folds of the hymen: that is the "operation." Its steps allow for (no) *method*: no path leads around in a circle toward a first step, nor proceeds from the simple to the complex, nor leads from a beginning to an end ("a book neither begins nor ends: at most it pretends to" [the "Book" 181 (A)]). "All method is a fiction" (1869, p. 851).

We here note a point/lack of method [*point de méthode*]: this does not rule out a certain marching order.

Which does not get under way without our investing, at the risk of losing it, a pretty penna.<sup>69</sup> If—as a folded sail, candid canvas, or leaflet—the hymen always opens up some volume of writing, then it always implies

69. We ought doubtless to have untangled the threads of this penna [*penna*] sooner: it is also, as we shall see, a term used in weaving. We turn again to Littré, from whom we have never, of course, been asking for the *truth*:

"1. PENNE, s.f. 1. The name given to the long wing- and tail-feathers of birds. The wing pennae are called remiges and the tail pennae, rectrices, on account of their particular

and implicates the pen [*plume*]. With the range of all its affinities (wing, bird, beak, spear, fan; the form sharpened into an *i* of all the points: swan, dancer, butterfly, etc.), the quill brings into play that which, within the operation of the hymen, scratches or grafts the writing surface—plies it, applies it, stitches it, pleats it, and duplicates it. "Your act is always applied to paper" (p. 369). It would be difficult to count Mallarmé's changes of pen, from writing quills to ostrich plumes, from the "feathered cap" of *Le Guignon* [*The Jinx*], the histrion's quill which in the *Pitre Châtié* [*Chastised Clown*] "pierced a window in the canvas wall" ("As a quill . . . I pierced"), the feather in Hamlet's toque (p. 302), all the feathers, wings, plumages and ramifications in *Hérodiade*, the "feathery candor" in *l'Après-midi d'un Faune* [*Afternoon of a Faun*], the "instrumental plumage" in *Sainte*, all the way to the "solitary erratic quill" in *A Throw of Dice*, standing alone, except for "except," on one page facing the following, in which we have lined up the words, flattening the typographical syntax ("solitary erratic quill / except / if a midnight toque meets or brushes it / and immobilizes / in the velvet rumpled by a somber chuckle / this rigid whiteness / laughable / in opposition to the sky / too much / not to mark / exiguously / whichever one / bitter prince of the reef / covers his head with it as if donning the heroic / irresistible but contained / by his little virile reason / thunderstruck/"), along with all the swords, wings, daggers, stems, etc.<sup>70</sup> Turn to *Hérodiade*

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functions; the former execute the flight, the latter direct it. . . . 2. A term of falconry. The large feather of birds of prey. 3. *Penne marine*, a species of zoophyte also called "sea feather." 4. (Heraldry) . . . Sometimes said of the feathers of an arrow. E. . . . from the Latin *penna*, feather, wing. . . . In French there is another *penne* signifying cloth, from the Latin *pannus*.

"2. PENNE, s.f. 1. Weaver's term. The beginning, the head of the chain. Penne threads: threads that remain attached to the loom after the cloth has been removed. . . . 2. A thick wool cordon fixed as a tassel at the end of a baton. E. Lower Breton, *pen*, end, head.

"3. PENNE, s.f. 1. Name of a type of beam. 2. Nautical term. One of the two rods composing the lateen yard or the main yard. E. Probably same as *penne* 2; that is, from the Celtic *pen*, head, end."

To this we will add not the definition of *penis* but that of "PÉNIL, s.m. *Anatomy*. The part in front of the pubic bone, the lowest part of the abdomen. . . . 'The bone called in Latin *os pubis* is called in French the *os du pénil* or *os barré*,' (Paré, IV, 34). In Provençal, *penchenilh*. The Provençal word undoubtedly comes from a form derived from the Latin *pecten*, which, in addition to signifying "comb," also has the sense of *pubes*. But through the form *panil* it tended to become confused with the common word *panne* or *penne*, meaning cloth, rag. This can also be seen in *penilien*, which signified both the *pénil* and a type of clothing. In Brittany, *pénille* signifies the frayed edges of a piece of worn clothing: 'please cut off these *pénilles*.' "

70. For a list of all these *plumes* and an analysis of this plumage or pen-box, cf. R. G. Cohn, pp. 247 ff. As far as its further implications are concerned, let us merely note that the raising of the quill always marks the imminence or the occurrence of its fall. We have the "terrible struggle against that mean old plumage now fortunately laid low: God" from the famous letter to Cazalis, the "faithful plumage" in the *Sonneur* [*Bell Ringer*] ("... worn out

and reread how much writing is gathered up, in its vicinity, by "*Une d'elles*" ["one of these"] p. 42. Elle, aile, L: masculine/feminine.

In the *Notes and Documents* that follow the chapter entitled *Toward a Dialectics of Totality*, Richard fans out the array of feathers (including the fan) in a series of pages of great beauty, moving from their angelic (seraphic) value to their "Luciferian, or at least Promethean, signification" (p. 445). Near the end of this extensive note (which is almost four pages long), following a parenthetical remark concerning the "phallic allusion" that Robert Greer Cohn "sees in the feather," Richard expresses some mistrust of a certain extension of polythematicism. Here is his justification: "For the word *plume* [feather] has also been understood to be the *plume* [pen] of the *writer*, and it is particularly upon this analogy that R. G. Cohn has founded his whole exegesis. This relation, which is certainly possible, appears to us, however, to remain unproven: the analogy seems excessively conceptual, both in its origin and especially in the details of its consequences. It seems to me difficult, and contrary to the genius of Mallarmé, to read *A Throw of Dice* as a literal allegory (even if, as Cohn would have it, that allegory is charged with spontaneous echoes and more or less conscious ambiguities). On this double meaning of *plume*, however, see the following text from

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from having pulled in vain / O Satan, I shall move the stone and hang"), the "heraldic plumage" and "black plumage" in *Herodiade*; beside the "naked gold" and "Aurora," there are "my two featherless wings / — At the risk of falling for all eternity?" in *Les Fenêtres* [Windows]; "Black, with a pale bleeding wing, deplumed, / Through the glass burnt with incense and gold, / Through the icy panes, alas! mournful still / The dawn threw itself on the angelic lamp. / Palms! . . ." (*Don du Poème* [Gift of a Poem]), ". . . the plumage is caught" (*Le vierge, le vivace . . .* [The virgin, vivacious . . .]), the hat "without feathers and almost without ribbons" of "my poor wandering beloved" (*La pipe*), ". . . the expected interval, having, indeed, the double opposition of the panels as its lateral partitions, and, facing out, in front and in back, the null-doubt opening reflected by the extension of the sound of the panels, where the plumage escapes, and doubled again by the explored equivocity . . ." (*Igitur*).

There is an opposition between black and white: *jet* (and its homonyms *geai* [jay], *jet* [water spout], *j'ai* [I have]) is a black substance or glass that can be painted white. The evening gown is a vision of plumes and jet ("Evening gowns . . . trimmed either with gauze or with embroidered tulle, and then with borders of white jet and feathers, with jet fringes, indeed with every possible trimming for a ballroom gown: can be worn at the theater, at a Grand Dinner, at an Intimate Evening, *but open in a square or quite squarely, never décolleté*" (p. 781, emphasis Mallarmé's); but the bridal gown is featherless, there is only a "veil of generality," like the dancer's hymen (*Rejoinder II*): ". . . the ancient custom of feminine attire par excellence, white and vaporous, as it is worn at a Wedding. . . . It is not loud, a Bridal Gown: it is remarked, as it appears, mysterious, following and not following the fashion . . . with brand new details enveloped by generality as by a veil. . . . A veil of fine tulle [*tulle illusion*] and orange blossoms skillfully woven into the hair. The whole is worldly and virginal. . . . Your ringlets will drop their curls in the space between two wings. A brilliant conception, isn't it?" (pp. 763–64).

1866: ' . . . I am very tired of work, and the nightly *plumes* I pull out of myself every morning to write my poems with do not grow back again by afternoon' (Corr. p. 219)."

Why should a "literal allegory" be "contrary to the genius of Mallarmé"? What *is* Mallarmé's genius? Does the idea of a "literal allegory" imply a monosemy that would reduce all quills to the writer's pen? But Cohn is conducting a completely different operation: he is establishing a network that *also* passes through the "phallic allusion." (Interestingly, despite the proximity of his references, Richard dissociates the "phallic allusion" by putting it in parentheses, and dissociates further from that "allusion" the critical paragraph we have just quoted.) Then, too, what is an "excessively conceptual analogy"? Why should what is "possible" be improbable? What is the nature of a proof of thematic affinity? Even without quoting the whole textual mass whose network Cohn displays (and which would provide us with quasi-certainty if recourse to such norms had any pertinence here), why wouldn't the text cited as a "however"—which confirms at least once<sup>71</sup> the possibility in question—give us reason enough to suppose that the writer's quill is always, on however virtual a level, implied and implicated in the cloth, wing, or tissue of every other kind of feather? This letter of 1866 (to Aubanel), juxtaposed with the one to Cazalis, will not fail to produce certain grotto effects. "Nightly emissions" and "nightly *plumes*": the solitary quill errs through a semblance of milky ways.<sup>72</sup> An operation (1 + 0 + 0) in which it expands its identity to exhaustion.

These grotto effects are usually also glottal effects, traces left by an echo, imprints of one phonic signifier upon another, productions of meaning by reverberations within a double wall. *Two* with no *one*. Always one extra, or one too few. The decisive, undecidable ambiguity of the syntax of "any more" [*plus de*] (both supplement and lack).

Are we letting go of the pen?

In the final paragraph of the same note, which is just as isolated as the one we have just cited, from which it is separated by a whole development,

71. Other examples can be found in the *Autobiographie* (p. 661) and in the *Bibliographie* to the 1898 edition of the poems ("studies with an eye toward something better, as one might try out the nibs of one's pen [*plume*]"), etc.

72. TN. A number of wordplays are lost here. The original sentence—*La plume solitaire et (est) perdue dans un semblant de voie lactée*—literally means: "The solitary (lost) quill (is lost) in the semblance of a milky way." Behind the sentence stands its homonym, *plume solitaire éperdue* ["solitary erratic quill"] from the *Coup de dés*. In addition, the idea of *loss* is lost when *pertes nocturnes* [literally, "nocturnal losses"] is translated, as here, "nightly emissions." In this text in which what is added is zeros, it is perhaps no accident that what is lost in translation is, precisely, losses.

Richard adds a "phonetic" detail. Everything would lead one to believe that he considers it a purely accessory curiosity: "And finally, phonetically, the word '*plume*' seems to have lent itself to a very rich play of imaginary associations in Mallarmé's mind. A few pages of notes included by Bonniot in his edition of *Igitur* (Paris: N. R. F., 1925) reveal that this one word was linked to a reverie on the personal pronouns (and thus associated with the dream of subjectivity) and to the related image of the upward surge ('*plus je—plume—plume je—plume jet*' ["more I—quill—quill I—quill jet of water"]). *Plume* is also a cousin of *palm*" (p. 446). These notes published by Bonniot are also quoted by Cohn (p. 253).

We include here a reproduction of that page.<sup>73</sup> Even assuming, which we do not, that only a secondary, reserved attention need be paid to the

*l'heure*      *acte*      *écho.*  
*a etc*      *le hourt*      *acte*      *'q. je*

  

*plus*      *choe*  
*se*      *acte*      *choze*  
*plus*  
*me*  


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*plume*      *a etc*  
*je*  
*plume*  
*jet*  
*choe*      } *ct.*  


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*huent*

73. This page makes apparent, among other things, the beveled construction of *Igitur*, in which the anagrammatical calculus of forms ending in -URE (*pliure* [fold], *dehirure* [tear], *reliure* [binding]) is even more condensed than elsewhere. This is the grating sound of the file of erasure. *Erasure* belongs to *literature* and even rhymes with it (pp. 73, 109, 119,

"spontaneous echoes" and "more or less conscious ambiguities"—do we find many of those in this play of the plume?

I also recall here the "*plume . . . j'ai troué*" ["quill—I pierced"; "j'ai" sounds like "jet."—Trans.] in the *Chastised Clown*, and the cluster composed of *j's*, jet, echo, more, plume, and wing, turning like a gull, carried along on a play of the *winds*:

Her American lake where the Niagara winds,  
The winds have been frothing the sea-grass, which pines:  
"Shall we any more mirror her as in times past?"  
For just as the seagull, o'er waves it has passed,  
Enjoins joyous echoes or drops a wing feather,  
She left her sweet mem'ry behind her forever!  
Of all, what remains here? What can one show?  
A name! . . . (*Her grave is closed*, 1959, p. 8).<sup>74</sup>

298), as well as with *Igitur* (which plays on *ci-gît* [here lies] combined with doors—*fors* [outside], *bors Tur* [outside the door], the "sepulchral door," the enclosure of tombs and of sleep, of *sommes* ["(we) are," "sums," "naps"], "it was the scansion of my measure, a reminiscence of which came back to me prolonged by the noise in the corridor of time at the door of my sepulcher, and by my hallucination . . ." (p. 439), and including the words "luminous suture," "hour," "former," "grandeur," "pure"—"I was the hour that has to make me pure," "furniture," *heur* ["bump"] (at least six times), "endure," "pallor," "aperture," "future," "aura," "superior," "pasture," etc.). An anagrammatical hallucination, delirium, folly (*folie*), an anagram of phial (*fiolle*) ("the empty phial, folly, all that is left of the castle?"). A crisis of the phial, but, it is worth remembering, also a phial of verse [*vers*] ("The Dream has agonized in this phial of glass [*verre*] . . ." p. 439). The seminal play of *coupes* ["cuts/cups"] (pp. 27 and 178): phial, vial, violate (p. 59), veil, *vol* [flight], *col* [neck] ("Would sow upon my veil-less neck [*col sans voiles*] / More kisses than there are stars [*étoiles*] / Than there are stars in the sky!"). *Voile-étoiles-voie lactée-voile*: masculine / feminine. [*Voile* can either be masculine, meaning "veil," or feminine, meaning "sail." The milky way (*voie lactée*) can also be seen as both masculine (scattering of starry sperm) and feminine (milk).—Trans.] *Dorure* [gilding]. [The word "*dorure*," which combines both *or* and *ure*, thus punctuates these word plays as a superbly condensed anagram for what is going on in footnotes 62 and 73.—Trans.]

74. "Wing feather [*plume de l'aile*] . . . her memory [*souvenir d'elle*]" ["aile" (wing) rhymes with "elle" (she, her).—Trans.]. The unfolding of this aviary and of this fan is perhaps infinite. Just to give an idea of this *défi d'ailes* ["challenge of the wings"; *ailes* also sounds like *l's*.—Trans.]: there is always a supplementary *l*. One *l* too few (produces a fall) or one *l* too many forms the fold, "a spacious writing . . . folds back the too-much-wing" (p. 859), guarantees the flight of the "winged writing" (p. 173), of the "Wing that dictates his verses" (p. 155). The wing, which can be "bleeding" (blank sense) and "featherless" (p. 40), can also at times be held as a quill ("Hold my wing in your hand," p. 58), "in the event that the written word be threatened, and [it] summons the literary Supremacy to erect in the form of a wing, with forty courages grouped into one hero, your brandishing of frail swords" (p. 420). And eventually, later on, to conjugate *i* with *l*. Henceforth he [*i/l*] will have, himself/lit up [*lui*], gathered up his powers. *l:i*—. [*lit* = "reads," "bed."—Trans.]



These plays (on "plume," on "winds," etc.) are anathema to any lexicological summation, any taxonomy of themes, any deciphering of meanings. But precisely, the crisis of literature, the "exquisite crisis, down to the foundations," is marked in a corner of this cast-off excess. The figure of the corner [*le coin*], with which we began, would testify to this in all the recastings and retemperings that have marked its course (an angle, an open recess, a fold, a hymen, a metal, a monetary signifier, a seal, a superimposition of marks, etc.). The *coin-entre*. If this crisis is indeed one of verse, it is first and foremost because the formal structure of the text, which is called *verse* in Mallarmé's logical generalization of it, is precisely what historically organizes, with the omission of the author (*plus je*), just such a form of excess. It has often been said that Mallarmé, without apparently having made many actual innovations in this domain, constructed his entire literary praxis out of the necessities of verse and rhyme: that is, once these two concepts have been transformed and generalized, upon repercussions set off among signifiers, which are in no way dictated or decided in advance by any thematic intentionality. Rhyme—which is the general law of textual effects—is the folding-together of an identity and a difference. The raw material for this operation is no longer merely the sound of the end of a word: all "substances" (phonic and graphic) and all "forms" can be linked together at any distance and under any rule in order to produce new versions of "that which in discourse does not speak." For difference is the necessary interval, the suspense between two outcomes, the "lapse of time" between two shots, two rolls, two chances. Without its being possible in advance to *decide* the limits of this sort of propagation, a different effect is produced each time, an effect that is therefore each time "new" [*neuf*], a game [*jeu*] of chance forever new, a play of fire [*feu*] forever young [*jeune*]*—*fire and games being always, as Heraclitus and Nietzsche have said, a play of luck with necessity, of contingency with law. A hymen between chance and rule. That which presents itself as contingent and haphazard in the *present* of language (this is a question raised by *English Words*: "Beforehand, we must define this point: the Present of Language" [p. 1049]) finds itself struck out anew, retempered with the seal of necessity in the uniqueness of a textual configuration. For example, consider the duels among the *moire* [watered silk] and the *mémoire* [memory], the *grimoire* [cryptic spell book] and the *armoire* [wardrobe]: while they might function in one singular way and have only one textual outcome in the *Homage* to Wagner, they are nevertheless open to a whole chain of virtualities including *miroir* [mirror], *hoir* [heir], *soir* [evening], *noir* [black], *voir* [to see], etc.



These spacings and repercussions are put forth by Mallarmé both as contingency ("a reciprocity of fires that is distant or presented on the bias as some contingency") and as "chance conquered," as the interlacing, by verse, of the necessary with the arbitrary. And we find ourselves back in the *Crise de vers* ("Now, a subject, fated . . ."): "The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet. . . . The makeup of a book of verse occurs innate or everywhere; it eliminates chance; it is still needed in order to omit the author; now, a subject, fated, implies, among the assembled pieces, a certain accord concerning the spot in the volume that corresponds. There is a susceptibility rationally proportional to the fact that each cry possesses an echo—the motifs belonging to the same movement will

75. We refer the reader here to the last two pages of *Quans au Livre* (pp. 386–87). These pages are inexhaustible; one should return to them again and again. The scattered quotations we have cited ought now to be gathered together. But we have not yet even pulled out this one, which conducts them, to be seen, or heard, or read: "The abrupt, high plays of the wing, will be mirrored, too; the one that conducts them, perceives an extraordinary appropriation of structure, in its limpidity, in the primal cataclysms of logic. A stuttered utterance, as the sentence appears to be, here ploughed down beneath the use of subordinate clauses, is multiplied, composed, and lifted into some superior equilibrium, where planned inversions balance each other out." Just above, we find the statement of the law of pivoting or undecidability, the "alternative that is the law." "What pivot, I understand, in these contrasts, for intelligibility? A guarantee is needed—

"Syntax—"

To guarantee intelligibility is not to assure univocity. It is, on the contrary, to calculate—through simple syntactic linkages—the precise play of an indefinite theft, flight, fluctuation, or acrobatics of meaning. *Entre, hymen*, and *le lit* are far from being the only examples of this play. Jacques Scherer (pp. 114–16) has pointed out many words that can alternately take on different grammatical functions within the same sentence, sometimes verb and adjective (*continue* ["continues" or "continuous"]), sometimes verb and noun ("offer"). I would add that Mallarmé himself has stated the law governing this procedure. That statement occurs in connection with the interjection, which Mallarmé so often employs to well-calculated effect. The monosyllabic *or* is an example of this rich alloy. While postponing the study of what *Les Mots anglais* still owes to historical linguistics, let us lift out this quotation (in which Mallarmé defines a law of three states): "Primordial laws . . . Here they are. The Aryan, Semitic, or Turanian involve the genetic distribution of Language, but another one, which models its phases more directly upon the development of forms themselves, would be: Monosyllabism, like Chinese, which is certainly a primitive stage, then Agglutination, or that junction analogous to what juxtaposes two Compound Words among themselves or adds Affixes to the Body of a Word almost without alteration, and finally Flexion, or the elimination of certain intermediary or final letters in contractions or case declensions. Whether it be this isolation pure and simple of the unalterable Word, or this copulation of several Words whose meanings are still discernible; everything down to the very disappearance of meaning, which leaves only abstract, empty vestiges to be accepted by thought, is but an alloy of life with death, a double means, both factitious and natural; *or*, to each of these *three states*, rich with all their consequences, there corresponds some aspect of English. It is Monosyllabic in its original vocabulary, which takes on that status in the passage from Anglo-Saxon to the King's English; one could even call it interjectional, the same identical word often serving as both verb and noun" (pp. 1052–1053).

balance each other out, reaching, at a distance, their equilibrium, neither the incoherent sublime of Romantic verses on the page, nor that artificial unit once measured into the book as a block. Everything becomes suspense, fragmentary disposition with alternation and face-to-face, concurring in the total rhythm, which would be the poem silenced, in the blanks; . . . " (pp. 366–67).

It is neither the natural arbitrariness nor the natural necessity of the sign, but both at once, that obtains in *writing*. It must be written. And sometimes the very gambols of Language itself bring this to the attention of the poet "or even the canny prose writer" (p. 921). Just before wondering whether "strict observance of the principles of contemporary linguistics will yield before what we call *the literary point of view* . . ." Mallarmé had led up to the question of alliteration via onomatopoeia: "A bond so perfect between the meaning and the form of a word that it seems to produce a single unified impression, that of its success, on both mind and ear, is frequent, but occurs especially in what is called ONOMATOPOEIA. Would one believe it: these admirable words, all of a piece, find themselves placed, relative to others in the language (we shall make exception for words like TO WRITE, which imitates the scratching of a pen as far back as the Gothic WRITH), in a condition of inferiority" (p. 920).

Hence, the practice of versification is coextensive with literature, which "goes beyond genre" (p. 386) and exceeds, in its effects and in its principle, the bounds of the vulgar opposition between prose and poetry: ". . . the form called verse is simply in itself literature; there is verse as soon as diction is accentuated, rhythm from the moment there is style" (p. 361). ". . . in Verse, the dispenser and organizer of the play of pages, the master of the book. Visibly, if its integrality appears, among the margins and the blanks; or else it is dissimulated, call it Prose, nevertheless it remains, if there is any secret pursuit of music in the reserve of Discourse" (p. 375).

The crisis of verse (of "rhythm," as Mallarmé also puts it) thus involves all of literature. The crisis of a *rythmos*<sup>76</sup> broken by Being (something we

76. In thus carrying the conjoined question of rhythm, rhyme, and mime to the *limits* of both the philosophical and the critical, one ought to include the lateral approaches provided by the following associations: (1) the definition of the literary, or more exactly, of verse, by rhythm (" . . . the literary game par excellence; for the very rhythm of the book, which then would be impersonal and alive right down to its pagination, juxtaposes itself with the equations of this dream, or Ode," (p. 663). "Verse is everywhere in language where there is rhythm, everywhere, except on posters and on the fourth page of newspapers. Within the genre called prose, there are lines of verse, sometimes admirable lines, of all rhythms. But in truth, there is no such thing as prose: there is the alphabet and then there are verses that may be more or less finely wrought . . ." (p. 867); (2) the relation between the rhythmic

began by spinning off in a note toward Democritus) is "fundamental." It solicits the very bases of literature, depriving it, in its exercise, of any foundation outside itself. Literature is at once reassured and threatened by the fact of depending only on itself, standing in the air, all alone, aside from Being: "and, if you will, alone, excepting everything."

Thus: rhythm, decline, inclined cadence, decadence, *fall* and return: "For, ever since that white creature ceased to be, strangely and singularly, I have loved everything summed up in the word: fall. Thus, in the year, my favorite season is the very last languid days of summer that come immediately before autumn, and, in the day, the time I choose for walking is the moment when the sun rests just before sinking, when there are rays of yellow copper on the grey walls and of red copper on the windowpanes. In the same way, the kind of literature in which my spirit looks for pleasure will be the dying poetry of Rome's final hours, as long, however, as it in no way breathes with the rejuvenating approach of the Barbarians and does not stammer out the childish Latin prose of the early Christians" (*Plainte d'Automne* [*Autumn Lament*] p. 270).

Literature, all along, in its exquisite crisis, shivers and flaps its wings, and goes trembling through the great divestment of a winter. I found myself wondering at first what might have prompted a title as strange as *Crise de vers*. Sensing that it harbored other virtual associations, I varied or toyed with certain elements. Unfailingly, the *i* and the *r* remained: *crise de nerfs* or *hystère* [hysterics], "*bise d'hiver*" or "*brise d'hiver*" [winter winds] (cf. the play on "winds" and the winter atmosphere in *Sa fosse est fermée* [*Her Grave is Closed*]), added to "*bris de verre*" [sliver of glass], which retains a glint of so many other Mallarméan "*brisures*" [breaks], reflecting a certain "*bris de mystère*" [whiff of mystery] ("Yes, without the folding back of the paper and the undersides this installs, the shadow dispersed in the black lettering would present no reason to emanate like a whiff of mystery, on the surface, in the parting prodded by the finger" [pp. 379–80]).

These associations are consonant with the first paragraph of *Crise de vers*. Like *Mimique*, like *Or*, that essay begins with the simulacrum of a descrip-

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cadence—or case—and all the falls, including the silent fall of the pen ("memorable rhythmic case," p. 328). "There falls / the pen / the rhythmic suspense of the sinister / to become buried / in the original spume / not long ago from which delirium with a start leaped to a peak / withered / by the identical neutrality of the gulf / NOTHING / of the memorable crisis . . ." (pp. 473–74); (3) the play between rhythmic suspense and mimic suspense, between rhythm and laughter ("or, the hour has come, for here is Pierrot . . . the Verse which, always clownish, exquisite, sonorous, splits into a moon from ear to ear or withdraws back into a rosebud, what with each smile or laugh contained in its syllables alone, moves the mouths of Mimes delighted to speak; and to speak with rhythm" [p. 751]).

tion, a scene without a referent. In all three cases, moreover, the music reserved for that opening spot consists in preparations for a finale: the evening in *Mimique* ("Silence, sole luxury after rhymes, an orchestra only marking with its gold, its brushes with thought and dusk . . ."), the "sunsets" in *Or*, and the winter afternoon in *Crise de vers*, spent in a glassed-in library with its closed bookshelves from which one has read all the books, shelf after shelf of old-fashioned literature, a "swishing of brochures" in a wintry atmosphere of icy paper and of open tombs, during a storm perceived through the pane of a window, a tempest seen from inside a glass:

"Just now, letting myself go, with the lassitude produced by one dispiriting afternoon of bad weather after another, I let drop, without curiosity seemingly having read everything twenty years ago, the fringe of multicolored pearls that smooths the rain, again, upon the swishing of brochures in the library. Many a work, beneath the beaded glass curtain, will line up its own scintillation: I love to follow, as in a ripened sky, against the glass, the play of lights of a storm" (p. 360). In an illusion of lights and swishings, you will almost have seen, in a burst of lightning, what a scintillation has flashed by—by him who seems to have read it all. Unless it (he) has rained (reigned).

Like *Mimique* (1886–1891–1897) and like *Or*, *Crise de vers* composes its transformations in three bears (1886–1892–1896). Among the three afternoons, the fabric is very tightly woven. In *Pages* (1891), what is to become the first paragraph of *Mimique* follows two other paragraphs beginning thus:

"Winter is for prose.

"With the splendor of autumn, verse ceases. . . .

"Silence, sole luxury after rhymes. . . ." (P. 340)

In this atmosphere bespeaking the end of history, the exhausted library plays out, swishing, all its scales; during the flood, it is swept away and yet protected by the thin transparent casing of a pane of glass [*verre*], by the fortunes of a verse [*vers*] or hymen; it is threatened with being eaten away from the inside.<sup>77</sup> The pane of glass, which serves as both an insulator and a

77. The opposition between metaphor and metonymy, which is an entirely semantic opposition, is deconstructed in practice by the superficial, profound, that is, abyssal operation of *versification* (*ver* [worm]—*vers* [toward]—*vers* [verse]—*versus*—*verre* [glass]), a constant process of fragmentation and reconstitution (*hiver* [winter]—*pervers*—*reverse*—*verso*—*traverse*—*vertigo*—*reverie*). All possible condensations and displacements are tried out by "Mr. Mallarmé. Who quite perversely / Left us for a breath of woodland charm / My letter, do not follow him aversely / To Valvins, near Avon, in the Seine-et-Marne." The network of these effects of versification would necessarily include the translation of Poe's "Conquerer Worm" [*le Ver vainqueur*] ("An angel throng, bewinged, bedight in veils . . . Sit

contact between the library and the turmoil, reflects all Mallarmé's other windows and mirrors, and affords a view, inside, of "many a work, beneath the beaded glass curtain." Beads [*verroterie*]: little bits of minutely worked *verre* (or *vers*) strung together like fragile poems, a "fringe" of "multicolored pearls," like a work that "will line up its own scintillation." Abolished baubles. A ptyx.

A sampling of feathers (and) of glass in *la Dernière Mode* [*The Latest Fashion*] will retemper the swishing alloy made out of winter and glass: "Breastplates, braces, corselets, etc., the whole charming, defensive getup that has long pervaded feminine attire will not discontinue the use of jet, with its steely scintillations, nor abandon steel itself, either. While not neglecting the rich array of feathers: natural rooster, peacock, and pheasant feathers along with ostrich plumes sometimes dyed blue or pink, we have continued to believe (here our predictions differ from those of others) that for the length of the winter the use of sequins, beads, and metal will go on" (p. 832).

All this intimate space, however, seals itself off only so as to remark a certain historical storm—the crisis—the final inanity of that of which there will never again be quite so much. It is the end and repetition of a year, a cycle, a ring. And the return of a rhythm: "Chimera, to have thought of that attests, through the reflection of its scales, to what extent the present cycle or last quarter century is undergoing some absolute strike of lightning—whose disheveled showers running down my windows wash across the streaming turmoil, until it illuminates this—that, more or less, all books contain the fusion of a few numbered rephrasings: and there might even be but one—in the world its law—bible as it is simulated by each nation" (p. 367).

I thus began to sprinkle the crisis of verse with splinters diverse: with slivers of glass, with bits of pearl, with "whiffs of mystery," with icy "winds" and dispiriting weather, with libraries and rain in winter [*hiver*]*—hilver*, win/ter, the sounds reflect, repeat, and condense the opposition in which they are found (I/R [*Crise de Vers*]), the function of the descriptive back-

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in a theater / . . . Mimes, in the form of God on high . . . The mimes become its food, / And the angels sob at vermin (!)—Trans.] fangs / In human gore imbued "[*Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), pp. 397–98]), the rhyme between *vers* and *peruers* (p. 20), *envers* ("vierge vers / . . . a l'envers [p. 27]), *travers* (pp. 29 and 152), and *hivers* (pp. 128 and 750). One can also follow that "luxury essential to versification, which enables it, in certain places, to space itself out and disseminate itself" (p. 327) in "*Surgi de la croupe et du bond / D'une verrerie éphémère / . . . / . . . ni ma mère . . .*" and in "*Une dentelle s'abolit / . . . / Qu'absence éternelle de lis / . . . / Telle que vers quelque fenêtre / Selon nul ventre que le sien / Filial on aurait pu naître*" (pp. 74 and 333).

ground periodically becoming an element in the abyss, a décor made to be carried away by repetition, made to engage there the whole of the library, the literature of yesteryear [*bier*], missing the V of the hymen.

In order to set up the library behind *Crise de vers*, the "author" has offered us its "bibliography." The *Bibliographie* appended to *Divagations* notes: "*Crise de vers*, a study from the *National Observer*, reincluding some passages omitted from *Variations*: the fragment 'An undeniable desire in my time . . . ' appeared separately in *Pages*." The Pléiade editors add: "The first three paragraphs of *Crise de vers* reproduce: 1. the opening lines of one of the *Variations on a Subject*, which appeared in the September 1, 1895, issue of *La Revue blanche* under the title: VIII, *Averses ou Critique* [*Downpours or Criticism*]. . . ."

The word *Averses* thus operates like a hidden line linking the crisis of literature to the crisis of criticism, to rain, to winter, to the storm, to the reversal of the golden age. A seasonal cycle with seasonable weather. Winter facts [*faits d'hiver*: sounds like *faits divers*, "news items," the title of another of Mallarmé's series of articles.—Trans.]. Mallarmé was unlikely to miss the channel running between *averse* and the English word *verse*, not only because that second language is always superimposed in some way on his syntax and vocabulary<sup>78</sup> but also because *Crise de vers* was originally published in the *National Observer*. Like the *Grands Faits Divers* [*Great News Items*] (in which *Or* is found).

The crisis of the alternative, of the binary opposition, of the *versus* (V), is thus inscribed in an atmosphere of death and rebirth, an atmosphere both funereal and joyous. It is a moment of wakefulness [*veille*], a wake for the dead, an awakening of birth, a watch [*veille*] and an eve [*veille*], a hymen between yesterday and tomorrow, a waking wet<sup>79</sup> dream on the eve of now.

78. This is not just a biographical fact. Witness the author's view of the subject in a context in which he discusses the theoretical question: "First and foremost, where are we French situated, when we undertake to study English? . . . There is a difficulty both here and there for anyone not gifted with universal knowledge, or not English; or, what should one do? Study English simply from out of French, since one has to stand somewhere in order to cast one's eyes beyond; but nevertheless check first whether this vantage point is a good one. . . . Reader, you have before you this, a piece of writing . . ." (*Les Mots anglais*, p. 902). "You have seen announced in our Preliminaries the third case of linguistic formation, which is neither artificial nor absolutely natural: the case of a quasi-formed language poured into an almost-formed language, a perfect mix occurring between the two. . . . Grafting alone offers an image that can represent the new phenomenon; indeed, French has been grafted onto English: and the two plants have, all hesitation past, produced on the same stalk a magnificent and fraternal generation" (p. 915), born of an "indissoluble hymen" (p. 914).

79. *Veille mouillée*: again, we encounter *Les Mots anglais*, and are forced to begin rereading. "There is not one consonant in French, nor even any vocal gesture of greater complexity, that is not represented, by one or several letters, in English: except the *L mouillée*

[palatalized]. Should we just change the pronunciation of a large number of our vocables by saying the two LL's as one, emitted in its ordinary way? that is too easy a subterfuge: for while our case consists in the modulation of a very weak, invisible *I* after the single or double L, the fact is that the said *I* always appears in writing *before*. Read *eventa-i-l*, *ve-i-lle*, *fam-i-lle*, and *dépou-i-lle*. Three solutions offer themselves to the recalcitrant foreign organism: to eliminate the *I*, as in APPAREL, CORBEL, COUNSEL, and MARVEL, for E; and MALL (a *mail*), MEDAL, PORTAL, RASCAL (from *racaille*), REPRISAL with A: or to join the *I*, making a diphthongue, to the preceding vowel, as in DETAIL, ENTRAILS, etc. (pronounced ai-l). And if one language gives in and bends to imitate the other, it will be, precisely, by moving the same *i* from before to after, that is by offering an image of our pronunciation, as we have analyzed it above: MEDALLION, PALLIASSE (a *paillasse*), PAVILION, VALIANT, and VERMILION. There is a total indifference to the number of L's, both there and in our case, the question focusing where *I* have placed it: on the *I*. It can nevertheless be said, to the detriment of the terminal *mute E* and to the benefit of this fundamental *I*, that while the latter is necessarily kept and the former sometimes dropped, the simple *IL* does not remain without some reminiscence of the *palatalized sound* [*son mouillé*] (pp. 981–82). And, as close as can be to the L, *son mouillé*, is the M, an upside-down double V ("you have before you this, a piece of writing"), of which all the examples, without exception, bend to the law of the *hymen* and of *mimique*. We shall cite not the examples but only the statement of the law: "A letter which, while it can precede vowels alone or indeed the full range of diphthongs, begins as great a number of English words as any other, M translates the power to make or do, hence a joy at once male and maternal; next, according to a signification springing from the distant past, it indicates measure and duty, number, meeting, fusion, and the middle term; and finally, through a change that is less abrupt than it appears, it can imply inferiority, weakness, or anger. All these meanings are very precise and do not group a multiple commentary around the *m*" (p. 960).

We had earlier, interrupting the flight of the dancer (*Rejoinder II*), suspended the case of the *i*. It must have appeared daring and risky—indeed, wasn't it?—to read the little point cut off—decapitated, unglued—from the body of the *i*, from the jabbing, dancing pointed toe, right beside the castrated pike or pointer, above. Since it is now possible to glimpse what goes (on) between the pen and its head, nib (*ber*), or end (*pen*), it is time to clarify this point. The rule is that nothing be touched on the spot [*séance tenante*]. Since what is in question is *one*—body proper.

Might Mallarmé not have been blind to what cuts the *i* off from what is proper to it? Perhaps; although the question of "eliminating the *I*," of the "benefit of this fundamental *I*," "the question focusing where *I* have placed it," would seem to indicate some attention on his part. In any event, he did not neglect the reverse of this figure: the sub-scribed point of exclamation! His syntax so often plays with it, interrupting the flow of a sentence with this strange pause, this disconcerting hiatus. He preferred it, in its verticality, to suspension points. And he saw in it the scanned agitation of a quill, head down:

About the exclamation point.

"Dujardin, that point is drawn

So as to imitate a plume." (p. 168)

And finally, the capital *I* — isn't it the English *je*, the ego (echo and looking-glass of the self)? *Les Mots anglais*: "I, *je*, Lat. ego; ice, *glace*; . . ." (p. 925). And the extra-text from *Ligitur. écho — ego — plus-je*, etc.

The *I* (capitalized) disseminates in advance the unity of meaning. It — multiplies it, deploys it, fans it out in the rainbow of the signifier, *iridesces* it. Instead of wondering whether the *I* of Idea is hypostatized in the orbit of Plato or Hegel, one ought to take into account its literal (*I* + *Dé*) *irisation* ("the capacity of certain minerals to become iridescent," Littré).

A filing question [*Question de la lime*]: *Idée* rhymes, cross-grained (or-referenced), with *orchidée*, which rhymes with *décidée* (pp. 92 and 171). *Gloire du long désir*, *Idées* ["Glory of the



The *Homage* to Wagner is teetering there, too. Here, the mortal remains are those of Victor Hugo. But in both texts we find the same structure, the same words, the same veil and fold and "a little bit, its rending." The same underside worn through, traversed, reversed, versified, diversified.

In a hymen depending on the verse, blank once more, composed of chance and necessity, a configuration of veils, folds, and quills, writing prepares to receive the seminal spurt of a throw of dice. If—it were, literature would hang—would it, on the suspense in which each of the six sides still has a chance although the outcome is predetermined and recognized after the fact as such. It is a game of chance that follows the genetic program. The die is limited to surfaces. Abandoning all depth, each of the surfaces is also, once the die is cast [*après coup*], the whole of it. The crisis of literature takes place when nothing takes place but the place, in the instance where no one is there to know.

No one—knowing—before the throw—which undoes it (him) in its outcome—which of the six—(die falling).

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long desire, Ideas"] rhymes with *La famille des iridées* ["The iris family"] (p. 56). The iris, the flower absent from all bouquets, is also the goddess of the rainbow and a membrane in the eye [(!) —Trans.] ("The conjunctiva extends over the white of the eye up to the circle called the iris," Paré), etc.

Or how is a reading decided?

Displaced almost at random — but that is the law, for along with delirium one *wants* writing — dislocated, dismembered, the "word" is transformed and reassociated indefinitely. *Le dé lit l'idée, le dais, ciel de lit, plafond estombeau, dé à coudre tous les tissus, voiles, gazes, draps et linceuls de sous les lits de Mallarmé, "lit aux pages de vélin," "absence éternelle de lit" ("lit vide," "enseveli," "aboli," "litige," etc.). III lis. III l'l. Il se renverse dans (le) lis. Il se sépare dans l'l". . . d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime l flétrie l par la neutralité identique du gouffre l RIEN de la mémorable crise . . ."*

## TRANCE PARTITION (2)

phal: but it foreshadows, in financial terms, the future credit, preceding capital or reducing it to the humility of small change! With what disorder are such things pursued around us, and how little understood! It is almost embarrassing to proffer these truths, which imply neat, prodigious dream transfers, thus, cursively and at a loss."

Mallarmé

"The words of Harlequin, introducing himself, are as follows:

**"I HAVE COME  
TO HAVE THEM EXTRACT  
FROM ME THE LAPIS  
PHILOSOPHALLUS."**

Increasing the silence  
after each segment of  
the sentence . . .

A short pause after: I  
have come—a long one  
after: from me—a still  
longer one, indicated  
by a suspension of ges-  
tures on: -phallus."

Artaud